

EDWARD BURNE-JONES
Victorian Artist-Dreamer

This is a reproduction of the painting 'The Knight and the Lady' by Edward Burne-Jones. The painting depicts a knight in full plate armor, including a helmet and gauntlets, kneeling on the left. He is looking up at a lady who stands on the right. The lady is dressed in a long, flowing white gown with a wide, draped collar and a dark, patterned sleeve. She is holding a book or a tablet. The background shows a dark, gothic-style building with a large arched doorway. The foreground is filled with various flowers, including yellow daffodils and red tulips. The overall style is characteristic of the Pre-Raphaelite movement, with its emphasis on detail and idealized figures.

THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART

EDWARD BURNE-JONES

Victorian Artist-Dreamer



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Stephen Wildman and John Christian

with essays by
Alan Crawford and Laurence des Cars

THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART, NEW YORK

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Directors' Foreword

The career of Edward Burne-Jones was in some ways typical of that of avant-garde artists throughout the last century. It began as a struggle for recognition in a hostile, conservative environment, where he was championed by a small group of aesthetically enlightened supporters, in this case led with singular effectiveness by no less a critical luminary than John Ruskin. Here ends, however, any similarity to such now better-known contemporaries as Vincent van Gogh or Paul Cézanne. Within the sophisticated and rapidly changing climate of British intellectual culture of the late Victorian period, Burne-Jones's star rose rapidly from the 1860s until the decade of the 1880s, by which time he could be considered the establishment artist par excellence, possibly the most admired and sought-after painter anywhere in Europe. But as so often happens, his own success laid the foundations for his critical eclipse. Already in the 1890s, with the aging of a generation of patrons and collectors enthralled by his witty and highly literate allegories and mythologies, Burne-Jones ceded popularity to a growing taste for abstraction and subjectless painting. Through the first two-thirds of the twentieth century he was all but ignored, his accomplishments dismissed along with the whole of the Victorian period as a momentary, even embarrassing sidestep in the progress of modern style. As is its wont, however, the pendulum of critical fortune has of late swung resolutely back, and it is now, one hundred years after his death, possible once again to admire Edward Burne-Jones as the greatest British artist of the nineteenth century, after Turner and perhaps John Constable.

The revival of interest in Victorian art in general, and of Edward Burne-Jones in particular, has been spearheaded by British collectors and institutions; it is still far less well known outside Britain than, for example, French art of the nineteenth century is outside France. It was partly to redress this imbalance that The Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Réunion des musées nationaux/Musée d'Orsay embraced the opportunity to join the Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery, home to the largest collection in the world of Burne-Jones's work, in this centenary

celebration. Edward Burne-Jones was the subject of a British Arts Council exhibition at the Hayward Gallery, London, in 1975 and of a smaller exhibition in Rome in 1986, but this exhibition will be the first comprehensive, monographic display of his work in the United States or in France. Our thanks is therefore extended first of all to the staff at these museums who contributed to making this exhibition possible, and in particular to Mahrukh Tarapor, Associate Director for Exhibitions, at the Metropolitan Museum; Jane Farrington, Principal Curator of Art, in Birmingham; Laurence des Cars, Conservateur, at the Musée d'Orsay, and at the Réunion des musées nationaux, Bénédicte Boissonnas, Head of the Exhibition Department.

Selecting the works of art to be presented in a monographic exhibition of a major painter is an arduous if enviable task. Reviewing contemporary and posthumous criticism and scholarship, combing through archives, sifting auction house records and museum inventories to produce a list of acknowledged masterpieces—these are the lifeblood of a curator's work. Shaping and refining that list to balance the stages of an artist's career, always sensitive to the exigencies of requesting fragile works of art for loan, are labors of patience as well as discernment rarely appreciated or even perceived by the public; the more successful a curator's choices, the less obvious are the efforts that made them possible and the more seamlessly inevitable they appear. We are thus extremely fortunate to have been able to call upon the rich experience and tireless dedication to their subject of two gifted scholars, Stephen Wildman and John Christian, in selecting, arranging, and cataloguing the present exhibition. Their task was daunting. Burne-Jones's restless inventive genius and will to create made him one of the most prolific artists of the nineteenth century. Mastering his accomplishments in media as diverse as tapestry, stained glass, and painted ceramics; integrating these with the vivid beauty of his drawings and watercolors and with the haunting mystery of his carefully finished oil paintings; organizing a chronology of works, some of which were labored over for periods of up to twenty years while others were reinvented in second and third versions spanning

decades of a quickly evolving aesthetic intelligence; and presenting this confusing mosaic of artistic output in a rational and satisfying scheme was an immense undertaking, one in which they have succeeded to near perfection. In addition, John Christian's extended essay on Burne-Jones's life and career, broken up in a rather unorthodox fashion to accommodate the complexity of Stephen Wildman's catalogue, provides a lively and expertly guided tour through the little-known byways of the artistic world of Victorian England. Alan Crawford has synthesized, evocatively and concisely, the seminal importance of Burne-Jones's work in media traditionally considered decorative. And Laurence des Cars has addressed the international significance of this centenary exhibition by reviewing the sometimes forgotten or overlooked fascination Burne-Jones's paintings held for Continental artists at the end of the last century.

Within the Metropolitan Museum, the responsibility of managing the many interrelated details that lead to the realization of the exhibition fell to Laurence Kanter, Curator in Charge, and to the staff of the Robert Lehman Collection, Dita Amory, Linda Wolk-Simon, Monique van Dorp, Francesca Valerio, and Manus Gallagher. Anna Riehl, in the office of the registrar, coordinated the myriad problems of transport and insurance, and Dan Kershaw applied his flair and artistry to the exhibition design. At Birmingham, thanks are due to Elizabeth Prettejohn, Glennys Wild, Helen Proctor, Brendan Flynn, Reyahn King, Elizabeth Smallwood, David Lucas, Richard Clarke, Haydn Roberts, Gill Casson, and David Bailey; and in Paris, to Ute Collinet, Juliette Armand, Anne Fréling, Jean Naudin, Anne de Margerie, and Céline Julhiet-Charvet of the Réunion des musées nationaux.

One of the happiest responsibilities of a museum director is that of thanking the many lenders, public and

private, anonymous and named, whose generosity has contributed to the success of an exhibition and its catalogue. Many of Burne-Jones's most important works were realized in experimental techniques, on unusual supports, or on a colossal scale that today render them highly fragile and difficult to transport. Our gratitude is therefore all the more heartfelt that so many people and institutions were willing to share the masterpieces in their collections with the public in New York, Birmingham, and Paris. Unusually, we must here also offer a special note of thanks to a number of lenders who expressed great willingness to share works of art that in the end were not included in the exhibition, and in particular to our old friend Don Luis Ferré and the staff of the Museo de Arte at Ponce, who could not contribute to the exhibition as they would have liked: Burne-Jones's last, and possibly his greatest work, *The Sleep of Arthur in Avalon*, simply proved too large to move from Puerto Rico.

The Metropolitan Museum gratefully acknowledges The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation for its generous assistance toward the exhibition. We also extend our thanks to the Roswell L. Gilpatric Fund for Publications for its support of the accompanying publication.

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Stephen Wildman
Lancaster

John Christian
London

Laurence des Cars
Paris

Alan Crawford
London

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Catalogue entries followed by the initials JC are by John Christian; all other entries are by Stephen Wildman.

Unless otherwise noted, Christie's and Sotheby's refer to Christie's, London, and Sotheby's, London.

A Critical Somersault

JOHN CHRISTIAN

It was rather sad—a little crowd of forlorn old survivals paying their last homage to the beauty and poetry now utterly scorned and rejected.”¹ Thus Graham Robertson, artist, author, master of stagecraft, and collector of the work of William Blake, described the private view of the exhibition that marked the centenary of Burne-Jones’s birth, held at the Tate Gallery, London, from June 14 to August 31, 1933. A few days later he went again “and found about two people there.” Even these, he noted, were not allowed to enjoy the show; the director, J. B. Manson, soon “marshalled them out of the room,” directing their attention to a recent painting by Walter Sickert with the words “Now here *is* something fine.”²

Robertson, of course, was prejudiced. A close friend of Burne-Jones for many years, he had watched with dismay as his reputation declined, eclipsed first by Impressionism (a development the artist himself had lived to see) and soon by more modern movements. It was going too far to say that the “beauty and poetry” of Burne-Jones were now “utterly scorned and rejected.” The Pre-Raphaelites and their followers have always had their admirers, and the fact that the exhibition was mounted at the Tate—indeed, that it took place at all—is significant. It included eighty-eight exhibits, well chosen by William Rothenstein, a survivor from the nineties who was by no means unsympathetic. He and the aged T. M. Rooke (1842–1942), Burne-Jones’s faithful studio assistant who was to live into his hundredth year, contributed to the catalogue, and a moving opening address was given by Stanley Baldwin, the artist’s nephew by marriage, who was currently between spells as Prime Minister. Contrary to Robertson’s belief, the show was well attended. It even inspired an editorial in the *Times*.

But if Robertson was being a little paranoid, his views were widely shared. In his foreword to the catalogue, Rothenstein admitted that there was “little sympathy to-day for the splendid achievement of the Pre-Raphaelite period.” Ernest Thomas, an assistant curator at the Pitt Rivers Museum in Oxford and a moving spirit in the exhibition, had written that he thought “the public would go if only to scoff,” while Sydney Cockerell, the director of the Fitzwilliam Museum in

Cambridge, who had known Burne-Jones in the 1890s, when he was secretary to the Kelmscott Press, was “dubious” about holding the exhibition at all since “the tide of feeling against B-J is high.”³ Nor is it hard to understand these views when we read the patronizing reviews that the exhibition received. For the editorial writer in the *Times* it was essentially an exercise in nostalgia. “We can smile at the too prevalent weariness of all the eyelids, the droop of all the mouths . . . [but] we continue to love him . . . for what he meant to our youth.”⁴ Trying to place him in a wider context, the paper’s art critic saw him inhabiting a kind of escapist ghetto. Burne-Jones, he wrote, “is best . . . enjoyed if he be taken . . . as an artistic dreamer, and neither regarded as in the central tradition of painting, when he is bound to suffer, nor used as a stick to beat the moderns—in which case the stick is likely to break in his hand.” Like a rather dim child in a world of sophisticated adults, he could approach “the central tradition” only with assistance. “Though he was not by any means a great draughtsman, he could profit by the great Italians in formal qualities when he kept them in mind.”⁵

Time and again Burne-Jones was criticized for not being more of a realist, with either an ignorance of, or a willful disregard for, the number of questions this begged. The young Anthony Blunt, writing in the *Spectator* on “The Pre-Raphaelites and Life,” saw the exhibition as “an example [“a lamentable example” was surely the phrase on the tip of his pen] of what one Pre-Raphaelite could do in sheer escape from reality.”⁶ “Burne-Jones,” declared *Apollo* sententiously, “will not live . . . because he accepted an interpretation of ‘poetry’ that glorifies life at second hand. He dealt in the shadows not the substance of art—unlike Blake, or unlike, for that matter, St. John, Dante, or even Chaucer.” Deep water indeed, but mercifully relief is at hand; for of course it is all a matter of health. “Who knows but what a different diet would have made a different man of him?”⁷

The *Burlington Magazine* failed to note the exhibition at all, although Roger Fry, one of its most regular contributors, expressed a wish “to write on him. We can look at him now quite dispassionately, and I’ve always maintained he had some qualities.”⁸ I myself remember catching echoes of this conde-

scending attitude when I visited Jim Ede, a former assistant keeper at the Tate and a thoroughgoing modernist, in the 1960s. He was then living in Cambridge, where he was something of a guru to my generation of undergraduates, introducing us to Ben Nicholson, Christopher Wood, Henri Gaudier-Brzeska, and other heroes. Filled with early enthusiasm for Burne-Jones, I ventured to mention the 1933 exhibition, with which I knew Jim had been involved. "Ah, yes," he said with a smile, "Burne-Jones. A third-rate artist, of course, but by hanging the pictures well we managed to make him look quite presentable."⁹

At least contact with the exhibition tended to induce an amused tolerance; if we move into a wider ambient, the tone becomes more shrill. Six years earlier, in 1927, Clive Bell, Fry's fellow articulator of Bloomsbury taste but far less intelligent, published his *Landmarks in Nineteenth-Century Painting*, in which he dismissed the Pre-Raphaelites as having "utter insignificance in the history of European culture."¹⁰ One wonders why, if they were so "insignificant," he accorded them full-chapter (i.e., landmark) treatment. Could it have been partly animosity, the temptation to denigrate an old *bête noire*? Certainly we are back with anxiety about the "central tradition," with a vision of Western art so obsessed with "formal qualities" that the whole Romantic-Symbolist dimension is not so much brushed aside as simply unseen. Bell does not, it is true, mention Burne-Jones by name, but by choosing *The Golden Stairs* (cat. no. 109) as his single chapter illustration, he implies that it epitomizes the sins of the entire movement.

Still, at least Bell had a thesis of sorts; others simply resorted to abuse. For C. H. Collins Baker, a former keeper of the National Gallery and currently Surveyor of the King's Pictures, Burne-Jones was "a weakling aesthete" who indulged "girlish dreams," and of whom "the best that will be said . . . eventually will be mild praise of his colour";¹¹ the observations occur in his book *British Painting*, published in 1933, the same year as the exhibition. But the prize for this type of myopia, intellectual laziness, or whatever one chooses to call it must go to R. H. Wilenski, who, in his *English Painting*, also of 1933, came up with the gem that *King Cophetua and the Beggar Maid* (cat. no. 112) was "the silliest possible still-life record of two models posing in fancy dress on a heap of Wardour Street bric-à-brac."¹² It is tempting to retort that this is the silliest possible comment ever made on a Burne-Jones.

Sixty-five years—Burne-Jones's lifetime a century on—have elapsed since the Tate exhibition, and we now commemorate his death in a comparable form. But the critical climate could hardly be more different. For another three decades Burne-Jones's reputation languished; some individual enthusiasm was occasionally kindled, but the public remained

largely apathetic. In 1940 Robin Ironside, like Ede an assistant keeper at the Tate but a generation younger, published a remarkable article entitled "Burne-Jones and Gustave Moreau" in Cyril Connolly's wartime magazine *Horizon*. In many ways the sophistication of this early reappraisal is still unsurpassed. Burne-Jones is firmly placed in an international context, and in direct opposition to earlier critics who had seen him as hopelessly outside the "central tradition" of European painting, the writer argues that "nothing could be more mistaken than to regard [his] art . . . as an exotic backwater." Ironside points out that all the agonizing about "formal qualities" is essentially irrelevant when assessing a picture by Burne-Jones; and he counters the regrets about his "poetic" inspiration and "escape from reality" by celebrating the artist's central role in a late-nineteenth-century culture, in which "painting and poetry drew together." Most perceptive and provocative of all, Ironside sees New English Art Club impressionism as the real agent of parochialism and reaction, suggesting that if it had not gained such a "fatal" ascendancy, "the art of Burne-Jones might well have brought forth a progressive symbolism which would have rendered the compelling influences of modern French painting less disconcerting."¹³ In other words, Burne-Jones, so long dismissed as an insignificant provincial, was in fact the true forerunner of mainstream modernism as it developed in France from Post-Impressionism onward, and might, other things being equal, have prepared British audiences for a phenomenon which, in the event, they were painfully slow, or even pathologically unable, to accept. No wonder Graham Robertson and other "forlorn old survivals" were delighted with this brilliant essay. But it was to have a sobering sequel. Two years later the Tate Gallery acquired Burne-Jones's late masterpiece *Love Leading the Pilgrim* (cat. no. 74). Ironside, who was still on the staff, must have been involved, but the price paid for the picture, a mere 90 guineas, is a graphic indication that his excitement was not widely shared.¹⁴

Meanwhile, in 1942 William Gaunt had published *The Pre-Raphaelite Tragedy*, a highly entertaining account of the movement which was widely read and which inspired many to look again at the artists' work. But the real opportunity for reassessment came in 1948, when the centenary of the formation of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood brought a flurry of exhibitions and led the Phaidon Press to publish *Pre-Raphaelite Painters*, a picture book with another illuminating essay by Ironside and informative catalogue entries by the young John Gere. Burne-Jones, understandably, was not the focus of attention, but he did receive one remarkable tribute from what at first might seem an unexpected quarter. Wyndham Lewis, reviewing the exhibition at Whitechapel in the *Listener*, went out of his way to praise the gouache car-

toons for the Perseus series in the Southampton Art Gallery (cat. nos. 88–97). Confessing himself “entranced,” he urged his readers “to make the journey to Aldgate East if only to see the . . . series. I am sure that Burne-Jones ultimately will be valued more than any of these painters.” Lewis saw his hero in terms that had now become fashionable when discussing the Pre-Raphaelites, as a “dazzlingly successful pioneer of surrealism”;¹⁵ but that the leading exponent of Vorticism should have fallen for these austere images of rock and steel suggests another, and perhaps more telling, perspective.

Lewis’s enthusiasm may be fascinating to the art historian but it had no recorded impact. When Margaret Mackail, Burne-Jones’s daughter, died in 1953, bundles of her father’s drawings, of the kind that dealers and auction houses now fight over, flooded the market and could be bought for a song. Four years later The Grange, Fulham, Burne-Jones’s London home for thirty-one years, was demolished to make way for blocks of council flats, and in 1963 his great swan song, *The Sleep of Arthur in Avalon* (fig. 107), was sold abroad with scarcely a murmur of protest. To risk another undergraduate reminiscence, I well remember how, at about this time, my request to see some of the Fitzwilliam Museum’s magnificent collection of Burne-Jones drawings was greeted with amused surprise. It was soon clear why. Gathered by Sydney Cockerell during his directorship (1908–37), the drawings had hardly been touched since the time they were given, in all likelihood by Charles Fairfax Murray (1849–1919), Burne-Jones’s studio assistant who had become a well-known dealer, or those two great connoisseurs Charles Ricketts and Charles Shannon, who had bought extensively at the second Burne-Jones studio sale in 1919. Many emerged from dusty portfolios; others, equally dusty, were still in the heavy frames and handsome but acid-retentive mounts which the master himself had favored.

But times were changing. By the mid-1960s the Victorian revival, one of the most dramatic developments in postwar art history and taste, was well under way. Those indeed were heady days, when many were seeing the light, savoring the joys of initiation, and burning with the crusading zeal of converts. The Victorian Society had been launched in 1958, inspired by old campaigners like Nikolaus Pevsner and John Betjeman, buzzing with Young Turks eager to denounce such acts of vandalism as the demolition of the great Scott-Skidmore choir screen in Salisbury Cathedral, which took place in the name of “simplification,” less “distracting fussiness,” the following year.¹⁶ That there was an element of *épater les bourgeois* in all this, a mischievous pleasure in shocking old fogies who believed that good taste had ended in 1837, is not to be denied. The Victoria and Albert Museum, which had mounted the important exhibition “Victorian and Edwardian Decorative Arts” as early as 1952 to mark its own

centenary, remained a center of enthusiastic expertise, of which the finest flower was the exhibition “Victorian Church Art,” held in 1971. Meanwhile dealers were beginning to specialize in Pre-Raphaelite drawings, Gothic Revival furniture, and Martin Brothers and William De Morgan pots, while Charles and Lavinia Handley-Read were establishing standards as scholars and collectors which have yet to be superseded.

It was against this background that all the leading Pre-Raphaelite painters were reassessed in major exhibitions: Ford Madox Brown (1821–1893) in 1964, John Everett Millais (1829–1896) in 1967, William Holman Hunt (1827–1910) in 1969, Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828–1882) in 1973, and Burne-Jones in 1975. The Arts Council was responsible for grasping this final nettle, and the show, which later traveled to Birmingham and Southampton, opened in London at the Hayward Gallery, its exhibition space on the South Bank. Fears were expressed that the civilized and fastidious work of Burne-Jones would be killed by this exercise in sixties concrete brutalism, but in the event it proved more than a match for its surroundings. It was symptomatic of his still equivocal standing that almost any picture the organizers wished to borrow was available, a luxury which no one assembling a Burne-Jones exhibition today can hope to enjoy. Size alone was a limiting factor, albeit a serious one since Burne-Jones is often at his best on a grand scale.

It was a further sign of the times that there were those on the Council’s Art Panel who still doubted the validity of the exercise, but their scruples were brusquely swept aside by their formidable chairman, Sir John Pope-Hennessy, who until recently had been director of the Victoria and Albert Museum, was currently director of the British Museum, and was in 1977 to accept the position of consultative chairman of the Department of European Paintings at The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. Recalling the Arts Council exhibition which took place during his chairmanship, Sir John wrote in his autobiography:

One of the most popular . . . was devoted to Burne-Jones. I, almost alone, had predicted its success. I had long believed Burne-Jones to be a much greater painter than Rossetti or Millais or Ford Madox Brown. . . . A cartoon for a stained-glass window by Burne-Jones of the Good Shepherd had been acquired not long before by the Victoria and Albert, and the figure, with its silky, over-shampooed hair, its sensual lips, and its glassy, introspective eyes, corresponded very closely with the models for male fashions shown in the window of Harrods in the Brompton Road. If this was what the young wanted to look like, they would, it seemed to me, be ripe for Burne-Jones. This proved to be the case.¹⁷

This account is not immune to criticism. The writer claims too exclusive a credit for recognizing Burne-Jones's virtues and predicting the success of the show. As for his talk of "over-shampooed hair" and "male fashions in Harrods," this is not quite so irrelevant as it might appear. Burne-Jones types *were* as familiar in the streets and magazines in the mid-1970s as they had been when Gilbert and Sullivan and George du Maurier satirized their prototypes a hundred years earlier. Nonetheless, to attribute a major artistic reassessment to the most superficial vagaries of fashion does seem a little inadequate. If one wanted to be pedantic, one could even point out that the Good Shepherd cartoon, which Sir John saw as so significant, is an extremely early work, by no means characteristic, and was unlikely, at that date at least, to have been known to more than a few specialists (cat. no. 4).

For all this, it is interesting that an art historian of Sir John's eminence rated Burne-Jones so highly. In fact, when I met him not long after the exhibition, he warmed to this very theme, telling me that he thought him not only the best of the Pre-Raphaelites but "the third greatest artist" that England had ever produced. Perhaps I should have known better than to ask him who were the first and second. He dismissed the question with an airy impatience, as if to say, "Don't be so silly," and to this day I can only assume that he meant Turner and Constable—or could it have been Turner and Gainsborough, or even Turner and Hogarth? However, despite its somewhat inconclusive character, I have never forgotten that conversation.

Sir John was also right when he said that the exhibition was a great success, and in hinting that it answered to the spirit of the time. It did not, however, represent a passing craze. Moods and aspirations may have changed dramatically during the last twenty-three years, but Burne-Jones's star has remained resolutely in the ascendant. Indeed few would deny that, far from being the "scorned and rejected" figure that Graham Robertson evoked in 1933, he is now one of the most

popular British artists, the subject of enormous interest not only in his native country but in Europe, America, Canada, and, by no means least, Japan. Since the 1970s we have witnessed every manifestation of esteem: monographs, biographies, learned articles, further exhibitions, pictures plucked from the obscurity of museum storerooms to be given pride of place on the walls, the popular culture to which Sir John Pope-Hennessy so quaintly refers, and of course those headline-grabbing salesroom prices that, rightly or wrongly, are regarded as a significant index of an artist's stature. It is to this ongoing process that the present exhibition gives, so to speak, a confirmatory blessing. For an artist to be accorded a centennial show not only in his birthplace but in two of the greatest museums of Europe and America must represent the ultimate apotheosis.

1. Robertson, *Letters*, p. 290.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 292. The Sickert was the full-length portrait of Gwen Ffrangcon-Davies as Isabella of France, painted and acquired by the Tate Gallery the previous year.
3. Lago 1975, p. 359.
4. *Times* (London), June 16, 1933, p. 15.
5. *Ibid.*, June 17, 1933, p. 10.
6. *Spectator*, July 28, 1933, p. 125.
7. *Apollo*, August 1933, pp. 120–21.
8. Denys Sutton, ed., *Letters of Roger Fry* (London, 1972), vol. 2, p. 679.
9. Ede gave a similar account of the matter in a letter to Mary Lago in 1973, observing that while he was "not particularly keen on Burne-Jones," he had been eager to make the exhibition "live as best I could" by his "arrangement" (Lago 1975, p. 361).
10. Clive Bell, *Landmarks in Nineteenth-Century Painting* (London, 1927), p. III.
11. C. H. Collins Baker, *British Painting* (London, 1933), p. 206.
12. R. H. Wilenski, *English Painting* (London, 1933), p. 225.
13. Ironside 1940, pp. 407, 419, 424.
14. The picture had been in the collection of Sir Jeremiah Colman, and appeared in his posthumous sale at Christie's, September 18, 1942, lot 61. It had fetched 5,500 guineas at Burne-Jones's studio sale at Christie's, July 16, 1898, lot 89.
15. *Listener*, April 22, 1948, p. 672.
16. See Victoria and Albert Museum 1971–72, p. 59, under no. F7.
17. John Pope-Hennessy, *Learning to Look* (London, 1991; paperback ed., 1992), p. 195.

Burne-Jones as a Decorative Artist

ALAN CRAWFORD

One day in April 1895, Edward Burne-Jones was at work in his studio, grumbling to his assistant, Thomas Rooke. "People don't know anything about our work and don't really care. . . . There was that design of Christ . . . no one even looked at it when it was shewn in the New Gallery. They only saw that it wasn't oil-painted; and yet it said as much as anything I have *ever* done."¹ The design of Christ was not one of his famous paintings, not *Le Chant d'Amour*, or *The Golden Stairs*, or *King Cophetua and the Beggar Maid* (cat. nos. 84, 109, 112). It was a design for mosaic decoration in a church. It was a work of decorative art. And yet he thought it said as much as anything he had ever done, and the remark reflects the importance that decorative art had in his own perception of his oeuvre.

Burne-Jones designed many things, including jewelry, grand pianos, and the costumes and scenery for a stage play. There is even a delicate watercolor design for a pair of shoes. But he was preeminently a maker of pictures, and most of his work as a decorative artist was in media that lent themselves to picture-making. He drew illustrations for books. He designed embroideries and tapestries. And he made designs for stained-glass windows.²

Photographs of Burne-Jones's studios show paintings and cartoons for decorative art jumbled up together (fig. 1). He knew where everything was and moved easily between the two kinds of work, both in the pattern of his daily life and in the less predictable workings of his imagination. One kind of work fed the other. In the late 1860s he drew more than a hundred illustrations for a proposed edition of William Morris's *The Earthly Paradise*, and out of these developed many of his paintings in the 1870s and 1880s. This happened easily, for nearly all his paintings were decorative, and nearly all his decorative art was pictorial. We are familiar with the phrase "merely decorative." To do justice to Burne-Jones's work, we should perhaps invent its opposite—something like "profoundly decorative."

GOthic REVIVAL

Burne-Jones took up decorative art for two reasons. One was that he needed to earn his living. This was always an important

consideration, except perhaps around 1880, when his paintings were selling particularly well. The other was that it was common practice among the progressive artists who shaped his early career to work across the boundaries of fine and decorative art. On the summer evening in 1855 when he and his friend William Morris decided that they would dedicate their lives not to the Church, as they had planned, but to art, neither at that time chose to be a decorative artist. But somehow that was the start of it all. Morris tried to be an architect, and then he tried to be a painter, both efforts meeting with little success; indeed, it was some years before he found his true métier. Burne-Jones, fragile but single-minded, was from the outset determined to be a painter. Learning to paint in London under the guidance of Dante Gabriel Rossetti, he found himself among Gothic Revival architects and Pre-Raphaelite painters who looked back to the medieval period as a golden age, when art was simply the enrichment of everyday things. The distinction between fine and decorative art, which evolved in the Renaissance, seemed to them stale and academic, and they proceeded to design furniture and decorate ceilings with the same enthusiasm as they painted pictures or carved statues.



Figure 1. The garden studio at The Grange, 1887. Photograph by Frederick Hollyer (1837–1933)



Figure 2. Edward Burne-Jones. Painting on an upright piano, 1860. Painted and gilt gesso on wood, with a layer of shellac over gilded areas, approx. 13 × 49½ in. (33 × 125.7 cm). Victoria and Albert Museum, London



Figure 3. Edward Burne-Jones. Upright piano, 1860

Sharing this enthusiasm Burne-Jones turned his hand in these early years to painted furniture, stained glass, embroidery, tile painting, and book illustration. In stained glass he quickly found his way. But other kinds of work, such as book illustration, were taken up, struggled with, abandoned, and then taken up again. The story of his early career as a decorative artist is a story of several beginnings. And each beginning requires its own explanation of medium and technique.

Late in 1856 Burne-Jones and Morris moved into unfurnished rooms at 17 Red Lion Square in London. Morris designed a massive table and some chairs for them to use, and, with Rossetti, they painted designs on the furniture. No furniture of this date that is known to have been painted by Burne-Jones survives, though we do have several pieces dating from 1858–60. On these Burne-Jones painted with amateurish vigor, treating the furniture more as a surface to be painted on than as a structure to be enhanced. He was very much an artist who painted on “found” furniture, unlike William

Burges (1827–1881), the Gothic Revival architect who designed the earliest neo-medieval painted furniture in 1856, where painted decoration and three-dimensional design complement each other.³ On several of these early pieces Burne-Jones’s imagery is rather strange, even macabre.⁴ On the front of an upright piano given to him and Georgie as a wedding present in 1860, for example, low down by the pedals, he painted a design of seated women, some playing musical instruments, others perhaps asleep, and all unaware of the figure of Death at the gate (figs. 2,3). The design was based on the depiction of lovers in the fourteenth-century *Triumph of Death* in the Campo Santo at Pisa. On the humble piano of a newly married couple, it surely created a troubling aura. The imagery on Burges’s furniture expressed clear and conventional associations: Bacchus on a sideboard stood for wine, Dante on a desk for literature. Burne-Jones’s imagery of sleep, music, and death suggests that the furniture of daily life may have been connected with stranger thoughts and feelings.

In 1856 Burne-Jones was invited to design stained-glass windows for the firm of James Powell and Sons. From the outset he showed an extraordinary affinity for the medium. Over the next five years he designed at least six windows for Powell’s and one for the firm of Lavers and Barraud.⁵ These form a distinct group in his work; the colors are particularly glowing, the lines vigorous and touching. The three-light window in the former chapel, now the dining hall, of Saint Andrew’s College, Bradfield (fig. 4), illustrates the theme of Christian learning. On the left Adam and Eve stand for the necessity of labor. In the middle is the destruction of the Tower of Babel, for the futility of merely human learning. On the right are Solomon and the Queen of Sheba, for wisdom. The crowding of figures and the shifts of scale between each opening could be seen as signs of Burne-Jones’s inexperience



Figure 4. James Powell and Sons. Stained-glass window in the dining hall, Saint Andrew's College, Bradfield, Berkshire, 1857



Figure 5. Sir Joshua Reynolds (1723–1792). Stained-glass window, west end, New College Chapel, Oxford, 1778



Figure 6. Clayton and Bell. Stained-glass window, apse, All Saints Church, Denstone, Staffordshire, 1861

in stained glass.⁶ But crowding is typical of all his work at this date. And he used shifts of scale between neighboring stained-glass compositions confidently six years later, as we shall see. What appears to be inexperience is in fact a particular sense of the relationship between the stained-glass window and the wall. It is common in stained glass to have a margin around each light, usually a narrow band of white glass between two strips of lead. At Bradfield there is no margin. The colored glass of Burne-Jones's design goes straight into the wall.

Medieval stained-glass windows were made of small pieces of glass, rather like mosaic, held together with strips of lead. Designs were confined to single lights, and pictorial elements were contained within decorative borders. The fourteenth century saw the introduction of larger pieces of glass and of silver stain, a yellow stain which could be used for painting on glass. Though still made in the same way, windows became less mosaiclike, more ambitious pictorially, and in the sixteenth century some were composed as single pictures spreading over

several lights. By the eighteenth century the mosaic approach had almost disappeared and windows were made by painting in colored enamels on large sheets of clear glass, of which the most famous is the west window in the chapel of New College, Oxford, designed by Sir Joshua Reynolds (fig. 5). As a matter of fact, little stained glass was made in eighteenth-century Britain. But the Victorian period saw a great revival of the medium, inspired by the renewed vitality of the Anglican Church, and particularly by the High Church movement within Anglicanism.⁷ This movement turned away from the more recent, Protestant traditions of the Anglican Church and toward the medieval church, with its public sacramental worship. And Victorian churches furnished in the High Church spirit naturally included stained-glass windows.

Thus the world of Victorian stained glass into which Burne-Jones was invited in 1856, and in which he spent the rest of his career as a decorative artist, had a quite distinct character. Here, more than in any other medium in which he worked, Burne-Jones was asked to accept other people's imagery. The medieval saints and angels, Nativities, and Crucifixions which the High Church movement had re-created in response to Protestant iconoclasm were given to him as subjects, and it was fortunate that, though he was not an Anglican, he was at home with High Church imagery. He had been caught up in the movement as a young man; it stirred his imagination. And when he abandoned the Church as a career in 1855, he did not abandon its visual language. Annunciations spoke to him about feminine awakening, Crucifixions about the wonder of redemption. He felt their collective, historical force. When Thomas Rooke remarked on the number of Adorations and Nativities he had designed, he said, "I love Christmas Carol Christianity, I couldn't do without Medieval Christianity."⁸

The style of Victorian stained glass was shaped by the Gothic Revival, in which the High Church movement naturally clothed itself. In the 1830s and 1840s the Gothic Revival architect A. W. N. Pugin designed windows inspired by the colors and mosaic construction of medieval glass, and in the 1840s and 1850s the antiquarian Charles Winston investigated the chemistry of medieval glass. The 1850s saw a flowering of glass in Britain that was convincingly medieval in style and, at the same time, original in design (fig. 6). Burne-Jones's designs are a part of that story, their vibrant colors and sometimes dense leading exploiting mosaic construction to the full. But they were not distinctly Gothic in style; rather, they were translations of his pictorial work into stained glass.

At this point we should take note of a common misunderstanding of Burne-Jones's glass. It is often described as "pictorial" rather than "architectural," as if he had been more concerned with how a window worked as a picture than with

how it worked in its architectural setting.⁹ But in fact he always understood the architectural nature of stained glass. “It is a very limited art,” he wrote in 1880, “and its limitations are its strength, and compel simplicity—but one needs to forget that there are such things as pictures in considering a coloured window—whose excellence is more of architecture, to which it must be faithfully subservient.”¹⁰ What he did not do was to assume that the decorative character of medieval glass represented the only, or even the best, kind of relationship between a stained-glass window and its architectural setting.

In the spring of 1861 Morris and Burne-Jones, together with the architect Philip Webb, the painters Rossetti, Ford Madox Brown, and Peter Paul Marshall, and Charles Faulkner, a university lecturer, set themselves up as a firm of decorators, under the name of Morris, Marshall, Faulkner & Co. They announced themselves as “Fine Art Workmen,” a phrase that effectively straddles the gap between painting and decorative art.¹¹ With the establishment of “the Firm,” as they called it, Morris found his *métier*. His talents in the visual arts, he discovered, lay in designing patterns and in running a business, and the company became a highly effective channel for his prodigious energies. It also became the source of nearly all Burne-Jones’s employment as a decorative artist.

Burne-Jones the painter was an isolated and sometimes lonely figure. But Burne-Jones the decorative artist always had William Morris. They were an odd pair, the one lanky and often ill, the other stout and explosively energetic. But they shared the same romantic imagination. They had their differences of taste—Morris looked to Iceland for inspiration, Burne-Jones to Italy. And they had one profound difference of belief: Morris looked to politics and revolution to redeem the world, while Burne-Jones looked—and all he saw was—in his heart and his imagination. But as decorative artists their differences were complementary. Burne-Jones was skilled in composition and figure drawing, Morris in patterns and materials. Burne-Jones perfected one skill, Morris was always exploring new ones. They could not help but work together, and the rest of this essay is, in large part, the story of their collaboration.

Soon after the firm was set up a stained-glass workshop was opened, and from that date Burne-Jones designed stained glass solely for Morris, Marshall, Faulkner & Co. This meant a different way of working, for early Morris glass was designed collaboratively. Philip Webb was responsible for the overall arrangements of many windows. Morris dealt with the crucial matter of color and oversaw production. Figure and pictorial designs came from most of the partners and from other artists. So whereas at Powell’s Burne-Jones had been the sole designer of his windows, at the firm his identity as a stained-glass designer was merged with that of his colleagues, at least for a

time. Morris’s combinations of colors—deep blues, ruby, green, and yellow—were more subtle and limited than Powell’s. And Webb liked the decorative qualities of medieval windows, especially those in which pictorial panels form a band across the middle, the top and bottom filled with the clear, lightly decorated glass known as *grisaille*.

It was some time before Burne-Jones’s distinctive qualities as a stained-glass artist reemerged. His most striking early design was for the main lights in the south transept window of the parish church at Lyndhurst in Hampshire, designed in 1863 (fig. 7). He designed four narrow upright panels illustrating the power of prayer, which were set in a general arrangement by Philip Webb. Like those at Bradfield illustrating Christian learning (fig. 4), they are vertical compositions, powerful and crowded with figures, and the scale and method of composition change from light to light. But whereas the designs at Bradfield derive much of their compressed power from their relationship to the masonry surrounding them, those at Lyndhurst hang in a vacancy, with Webb’s *grisaille* above and below.

John Ruskin held a special place among the friends and mentors of the young Burne-Jones. In 1863 he was thinking of moving abroad, but Burne-Jones urged him to find a house in England instead and, as an inducement, designed a set of embroidered hangings for it. The set was based on Chaucer’s stories of faithful and self-sacrificing wives and lovers, “The Legend of Goode Wimmen,” with Dido, Cleopatra, Ariadne, and the others embroidered among daisies and roses round the room (fig. 8). It would be, he told Ruskin, “the sweetest and costliest room in all the world.”¹² About 1860 William Morris had designed similar embroidered hangings for the walls of his drawing room at Red House, with heroines from history and legend; Jane Morris, Georgiana Burne-Jones, and others embroidered some of the figures, but the scheme was never completed. And while working for Ruskin, Burne-Jones designed a less ambitious scheme of figures from Sir Thomas Malory’s *Morte d’Arthur* for his own home, of which Georgie embroidered four. There was a romantic sense here, which Morris and Burne-Jones shared, of a room hung round with stories, stories that, taken from their favorite medieval authors, traced for them the ways of the heart and soul.

It is notable that the men designed and the women executed. Unlike other products of the firm, Victorian embroideries were normally made by middle-class women for their own amusement, in the home. In Morris’s slightly bohemian circle of the early 1860s, embroidery production can be seen as inspired amateurism, young families at Red House on the weekends, arguing, stitching, painting, fooling about. Later, without ceasing to be women’s work, it became part of the normal production of the firm.

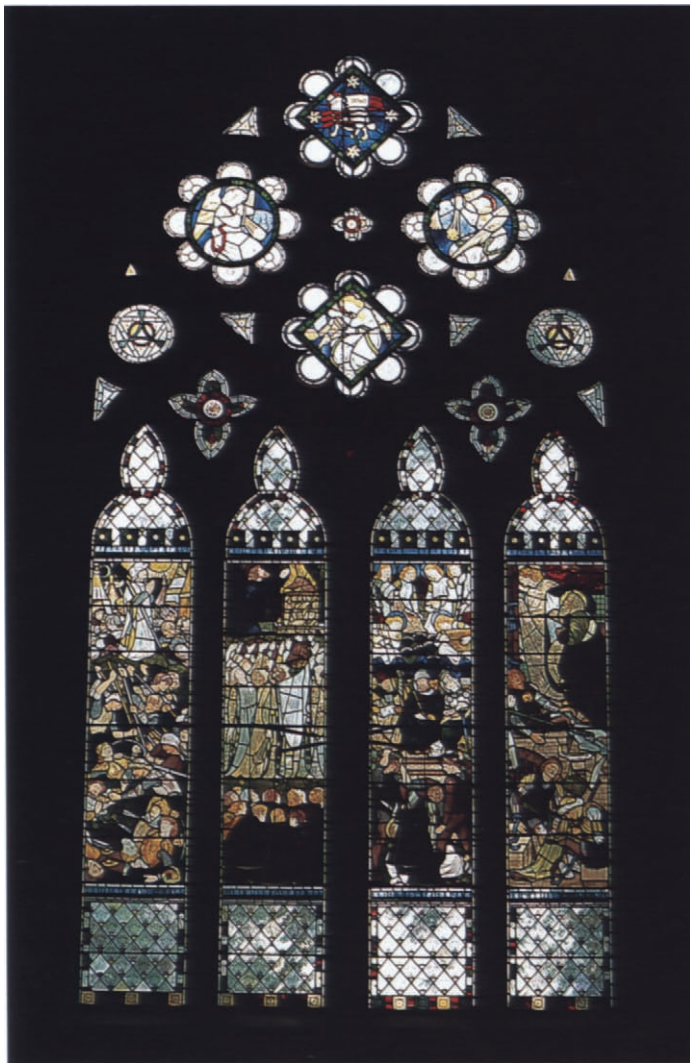


Figure 7. Morris, Marshall, Faulkner & Co. Stained-glass window, south transept, Saint Michael and All Angels Church, Lyndhurst, Hampshire, 1863

The year 1865 saw Morris and Burne-Jones at work on what might have been their greatest collaboration in storytelling, an illustrated edition of Morris's suite of new poems, *The Earthly Paradise*. They dreamed of a massive folio with several hundred black-and-white illustrations, as definite and vigorous as the woodcuts of Dürer and Holbein. The illustrations would be done in wood engraving, the usual method for printing images alongside text from about 1830 onward. The close-grained blocks of the wood engraver produced fine detail and a range of tone. In the 1850s and 1860s they made possible a flowering of illustration by artists centered around the Pre-Raphaelites and the engraving workshops of the Dalziel brothers and Joseph Swain, whose craftsmen prided themselves on producing facsimiles of artists' work. The wood engraving *The Maids of Elfen-Mere* (1854), by Rossetti, which had first inspired Burne-Jones to seek him out and thus to become an artist, was engraved by the Dalziels. And in 1862 Burne-Jones himself was asked by the Dalziels to provide two illustrations for the religious weekly magazine *Good Words*, as well as several more for a proposed illustrated Bible.

Fine detail and a range of tone were all very well, but Burne-Jones believed that drawings to be engraved should be simple, neat, and unequivocal. As he put it while working for the Dalziels, there should be no "scribbly work . . . stupid, senseless rot that takes an artist half a minute to sketch and an engraver half a week to engrave."¹³ Dürer and Holbein

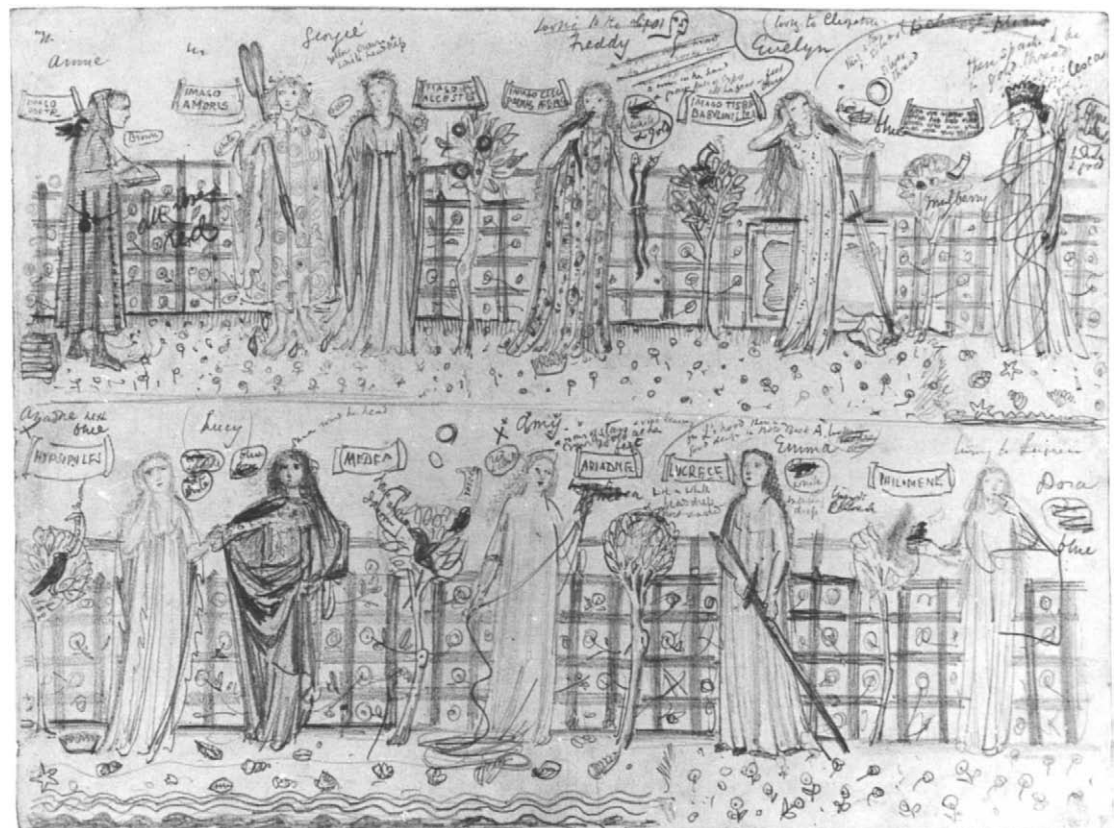


Figure 8. Edward Burne-Jones. Sketch design for embroidered hangings on the theme of "The Legend of Goode Wimmen," ca. 1863. Pencil, 10½ × 14 in. (26.7 × 35.6 cm). Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery

had influenced his drawings and paintings in the 1850s and 1860s, and he saw in their work a certainty of line and a sense of cutting.¹⁴ It is important that these early northern works were woodcuts and not wood engravings; that is, they were cut from blocks taken from the length of the tree like planks, not engraved on the denser blocks taken from the width of the tree. The lines of a woodcut need to be simple and thick if the weaker block is not to break under the pressure of printing. Thus, Burne-Jones's taste was paradoxical: he was using a new technology to express the qualities of an old one.

Burne-Jones produced more than a hundred illustrations over the next two years, seventy of which were illustrations for Morris's idealized retelling of Apuleius's tale of love-testing and life journeys, *The Story of Cupid and Psyche* (cat. nos. 40a-1). Psyche, a vulnerable figure in simple flowing drapery, moves among rocks and deserts and through strange places where the divine and the human intersect. Some of these settings Burne-Jones took from the woodcuts in Francesco Colonna's *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili* (Venice, 1499), a story of more arcane wandering and more erotic love than *Cupid and Psyche*. Its bizarre symbolic landscapes and processions of long-robed figures in the spare, outline style of Venetian woodcuts stayed with him for many years.

He drew in a simple, linear style in pencil on tracing paper, using woodcut conventions such as close parallel lines, in a kind of shorthand made possible by the taste that he and Morris shared. The firm of Joseph Swain was employed to engrave the blocks, but the engraver seems not to have understood Burne-Jones's purpose and rendered his drawing in the usual style of contemporary book illustration, with a certain amount of "scribbly work."¹⁵ Morris then took over himself, with friends and employees, though admittedly they did not as a group have much experience. Nearly all the blocks for *Cupid and Psyche* were engraved by Morris, who created the thick, vigorous lines and the close texture of black and white which spreads across the whole of the block.¹⁶ Though employing the tools and blocks of the wood engraver, he worked as if he were making woodcuts, using the more sophisticated means to achieve the less sophisticated (but in this case more expressive) result.¹⁷

In the event, the project of a fully illustrated *Earthly Paradise* was abandoned, and the text of the first volume was published in 1868 with only a single wood-engraved tailpiece. Perhaps it had begun to seem too ambitious. These were difficult years for Burne-Jones, his troubled love affair with Maria Zambaco always in the background. His account book records no work at all for the firm in the second half of 1867. And in the list he made of his pictures, the entry for 1868 is simply, "This year did little work through illness."¹⁸

AESTHETIC MOVEMENT

Burne-Jones reached his maturity as a decorative artist in the 1870s. He now drew with extraordinary skill, and had large conceptions. New kinds of work were taken up, established ones pushed to new limits. These were the years of the Aesthetic movement, when paintings were valued for their decorative qualities and certain kinds of decorative art were treated as seriously as paintings. Burne-Jones had always worked across these boundaries, and in the late 1860s a lighter, more purely decorative mood replaced the Gothic intensity of his early work. He influenced the Aesthetic movement and was influenced by it in his turn. Indeed, after his success at the opening exhibition of the Grosvenor Gallery in 1877, he was one of its heroes. But if the Aesthetic movement had an idea, it was to undo the links that Victorian culture had made between art and morality, to promote "art for art's sake."¹⁹ No one knew better than Burne-Jones that painting is its own mysterious language. When people asked him what *The Golden Stairs* (cat. no. 109) meant, he could not tell them.²⁰ But he could not accept that art is concerned only with itself. And indeed, nearly all his work denies that conception.²¹

He came into his own as a stained-glass designer in the 1870s. Within the firm no new designs now came from Rossetti, and few from Philip Webb or Morris. Ford Madox Brown withdrew in 1875, angered at the reorganization of the firm as Morris & Company under Morris's sole control. That left Morris in his usual role and Burne-Jones as the only source of new figure designs, which he remained for the rest of his life.²² Their collaboration was close. In many windows of these years white-robed figures stand against backgrounds of deep color. The radiance of the windows and the chalky substance of the figures is due not only to Burne-Jones's virtuosic drawing of drapery but also to the skill of the glass painters who created its equivalent on clear glass, and to Morris's deep reds, browns, and range of blues, and the green of his foliage, which set off the figures, giving them their off-white glow. You can see the separate contributions, but you cannot isolate them.

Two kinds of window are typical of Burne-Jones's glass in this middle period. One is the single figure in a single light. Here we see Burne-Jones bringing his study of the Italian Renaissance masters to bear on the simplest way of filling a narrow Gothic opening. Between 1872 and 1876 he designed eleven windows for the nave and transepts of the chapel at Jesus College, Cambridge, all using single figures. In four of them an Evangelist stands in the central light, with a Sibyl on either side (fig. 9). (The Sibyls were figures from classical literature who, like the Old Testament prophets, were thought to foretell the Christian gospel.) Two skillful studies for Saint



Figure 9. Morris, Marshall, Faulkner & Co. Stained-glass window, south transept, Jesus College Chapel, Cambridge, 1873–74

Matthew survive, one showing the saint naked, the other draped (figs. 10, 11). The imagery of these windows reminds us that Burne-Jones, on his Italian journey of 1871, spent many hours lying on his back in the Sistine Chapel peering through an opera glass. The bulk and mannered posture of the Evangelists is particularly Michelangelesque: “Such is their strength,” wrote Martin Harrison and Bill Waters, “that they appear to bulge out of the frame.”²³ Their drapery expresses monumentality. That of the Sibyls, as well as the agitated folds of many figures at this time, expresses movement, echoes of Botticelli and Mantegna. It is not a quality that one expects in stained glass, but there are times in Burne-Jones’s windows of this date when the figures seem to dance.

The second kind of window is a single composition spread over several lights, regardless of the intervening mullions. In 1874–75 Burne-Jones designed two east windows of this kind. At Allerton in Liverpool, his design was based on Jan van Eyck’s altarpiece *The Adoration of the Holy Lamb* (1432; Cathedral of Saint Bavon, Ghent), with the Rivers of Paradise flowing through five separate lights. At Easthampstead in

Berkshire his theme was the Last Judgment (fig. 12; cat. no. 71). The Easthampstead window is more powerful, thanks to Morris’s economy of color (so much cream) and Burne-Jones’s complex handling of the architectural setting, the surrounding darkness. He accepts it, crowding Saint Michael and the recording angels down into the center light. He denies it, spreading a single image over three lights and tracery. And, most remarkably, he exploits it, burying the theological focus of the whole window in the sexfoil at the top, where Christ points to his wounds, redeeming the drama in the lights below.

Allover compositions suited the east window of a church, single-figure compositions the less important windows in the nave and aisles. But in 1880 Burne-Jones designed the east window of Saint Martin’s Church, Brampton, as a mixture of the two (fig. 13). There were fifteen subjects, each newly designed, in five separate lights. The rich, continuous background of flowers and foliage, designed by Morris, and the inward-facing figures unify the design. The window sums up much of what is best in Burne-Jones’s windows of the 1870s—the figures either dancing or statuesque, the bold compositions, and above all the radiant color that fills the openings (though the radiance is lost in reproduction).

Burne-Jones kept a record of his charges to the firm in an account book. Sometimes he would add a stagy, comic note, recording the triumphs and failures of his “genius” and the “meanness” of his employer, Mr. Morris. The entry for the east window at Brampton reads:

To Brampton window—a colossal work of fifteen subjects—a masterpiece of style, a chef d’oeuvre of invention, a capo d’opera of conception—fifteen compartments—a Herculean labour—hastily estimated in a moment of generous friendship for £200, if the firm regards as binding a contract made from a noble impulse, and in a mercenary spirit declines to re-open the question, it must remain—but it will remain equally a monument of art and ingratitude—£200.²⁴

Morris would have heard, in Burne-Jones’s exultation and equally in his tongue-in-cheek reproach, his happiness at work well done.

Between 1872 and 1878 Burne-Jones produced more than 270 cartoons for stained glass, or about one every eight and a half days.²⁵ Such extraordinary productivity implied an efficient system of working for the firm. It varied according to the type of project. For stained glass he generally drew full-size cartoons freehand; he liked to do this after dinner while Georgie read to him. “The soft scraping sound of the charcoal in the long smooth lines comes back to me,” she wrote.²⁶ He drew designs for tapestries, on the other hand, to a small scale,



Figure 10. Edward Burne-Jones. Nude study for *Saint Matthew*, south transept, Jesus College Chapel, Cambridge, 1873. Pencil, $9\frac{5}{8} \times 6\frac{7}{8}$ in. (24.6 × 17.4 cm). Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery



Figure 11. Edward Burne-Jones. Draped study for *Saint Matthew*, 1873. Pencil, $9\frac{5}{8} \times 6\frac{7}{8}$ in. (24.6 × 17.4 cm). Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery

and then had them enlarged photographically.²⁷ He drew book illustrations with an eye to the engraving process, as we have seen, but we have also seen how large a part the wood engraver played. All the time he worked at one remove from the workshop and the product, not because he did not know or care about the processes involved, but because he was working with Morris. This studio-based system can be compared with that of a modern designer, or of a Renaissance artist. But in many ways it was unique, shaped by his relationship with Morris.

In the 1870s Burne-Jones returned to embroidery, stimulated as so often by Morris's enthusiasms and experiments. In the early and mid-Victorian periods, the most popular embroidery was Berlin woolwork, pictorial designs precisely reproduced in tightly packed cross-stitch. (In the United States these were known as "zephyrs.") The Gothic Revival architects Pugin and G. E. Street were the first to challenge its dominance, reviving medieval embroidery styles for church work; the earliest embroideries of the firm were of this kind.

But from the 1870s Morris designed a greater number of secular embroideries, hangings, cushion covers, fire screens, and so on, which were either made up by women working for the firm or bought as designs to be embroidered at home. This shift toward the feminine and the domestic was typical of the Aesthetic movement, and Morris may have been encouraged in it by the Royal School of Art Needlework, founded in 1872 to promote "Ornamental Needlework for secular purposes" and to provide employment for "poor gentlewomen."²⁸

Burne-Jones and Morris collaborated on several embroidery designs for the Royal School, and on the embroidered hangings for Rounton Grange, which present scenes from the *Romaunt of the Rose*, a medieval dream-debate over love then attributed to Chaucer (fig. 14; cat. nos. 72–81). The techniques and materials of the Rounton hangings belong to embroidery—shimmering silks, wools, and gold thread worked in the long stitches and subtle gradations of color typical of English medieval embroidery and late-seventeenth-century crewelwork. But their size—they are about three feet high



Figure 12. Morris & Company. Stained-glass window, east end, Church of Saint Michael and Saint Mary Magdalene, Easthampstead, Berkshire, 1874–75

and about sixty feet long—is more like tapestry. They look back to the embroidered hangings of the 1860s and forward to the Morris/Burne-Jones tapestries of the 1880s. On a quite different scale were some of the designs Burne-Jones made to be embroidered by Frances, the daughter of his friend and client William Graham, one of a number of clever, and usually beautiful, young women with whom he was at various times platonically, and perhaps deeply, in love (fig. 15). These were so small that the details of faces, hands, and feet were too fine for silks and wools, and he painted them in himself, as in some embroidered pictures he had seen in her father's collec-

tion. It was typical of Burne-Jones that he should see the possibilities for love in the domestic production of embroidery.

In 1878 Burne-Jones designed a grand piano for himself and Georgie (present whereabouts unknown) to replace their little upright, which was by then worn out. The episode that followed was unusual in Burne-Jones's decorative work for three reasons. Morris and the firm were not much involved. The design was for a three-dimensional object. And the inspiration came not from an imagined Middle Ages or a closely studied Renaissance but from the eighteenth century.

From about 1800 grand pianos in France and England grew



Figure 13. Morris & Company. Stained-glass window, east end, Saint Martin's Church, Brampton, Cumbria, 1878

larger and more elaborately curved, mainly in response to technical developments, reaching roughly their present shape about 1860. Burne-Jones was sensitive to the importance of pianos in women's lives and thought they were a bulbous offense in the feminine domain of the drawing room. He wrote, "I have been wanting for years to reform pianos, since they are as it were the very altar of homes, and a second hearth to people, and so hideous to behold mostly that with a fiery rosewood piece of ugliness it is hardly worth while to mend things."²⁹

For the case of his instrument Burne-Jones returned to the

angular lines of eighteenth-century harpsichords and early pianos, with only a shallow curve, a sharp angle at the end, and a trestle to rest on instead of massive turned legs. It was made of oak, stained green, by John Broadwood and Sons of London.

He knew of course that the glory of some early keyboard instruments was their painted decoration, the fantasy or panorama that greets you as you lift the lid. In 1879 William Graham ordered a similar piano from Burne-Jones as a present for Frances, and this one was to be painted (cat. no. 125). In its sumptuousness the Graham piano was a far cry from the



Figure 14. Edward Burne-Jones and William Morris (1834–1896). The dining room of Rounton Grange, near Northallerton, North Yorkshire, with embroidered hangings on the theme of the *Romaunt of the Rose* (cat. nos. 72–81), ca. 1915



Figure 15. Edward Burne-Jones, *Ruth*, ca. 1878. Embroidery with painted details, 10 × 4¼ in. (25.4 × 12.1 cm). Private collection, England

little upright that Burne-Jones had painted in 1860. And yet it struck the same strange note. The story of Orpheus and Eurydice which decorates the sides is about music, but it is also about death (fig. 16).

Burne-Jones was always a little uneasy with the fact that easel paintings could be bought and tucked away in private collections. “I want big things to do and vast spaces,” he said, “and for common people to see them and say Oh!—only Oh!”³⁰ His chance came in 1881, when G. E. Street asked him to design mosaic decorations for the American Episcopal church in Rome, Saint Paul’s Within-the-Walls (fig. 17). The designs were settled in sketch form between about 1881 and 1886, but the project moved slowly, awaiting donors. The Heavenly Jerusalem in the apse at the far end of the church, with a very Byzantine Christ in Glory, was installed in 1885. Then came an Annunciation in an eerie, empty landscape over the arch at the front of the chancel in 1893, and the Tree of Life between these two in 1894.³¹ A frieze of figures below the Heavenly Jerusalem, sometimes known as the Church Militant, was completed by Rooke from Burne-Jones’s sketches in 1906–7.

The Tree of Life is an instance where Burne-Jones actually developed Christian imagery.³² The arms of Christ in front of the tree are spread out, as in Byzantine images where Christ does not hang in suffering but triumphs over death. Only here the arms are spread more in blessing than in triumph. The tree

flourishes. Medieval Christianity had an image of the cross as the tree of life, but Burne-Jones’s image is all tree, all life, and no cross. To either side, where we would normally see the Virgin Mary and Saint John, are Adam and Eve and their children, an arrangement that moves the focus of the scene from the event itself to the significance of the event. This is a most benign redemption, an image about growth and the possibility of blessing in life. The Tree of Life is the design with which this essay began.



Figure 16. Edward Burne-Jones, *Orpheus Leading Eurydice Out of Hell* and *Orpheus Looking Back*. Painted roundels on the Graham piano, 1879–80. Private collection, England (see also cat. no. 125)

Burne-Jones pretended to feel old in the 1880s and 1890s, and he railed against Impressionism. But he was encouraged by the Arts and Crafts movement, which took shape in London in the 1880s, with its enthusiasm for old ways of working, its little workshops, its crossing and recrossing of the line between fine and decorative art. It might have been tiresome listening to people talk about the unity of art when he had been practicing it for years without talking about it, but after seeing the first exhibition put on by the Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society in London in 1888, he wrote, "Amongst some stuff and nonsense are some beautiful things, delightful to look at, and here for the first time one can measure a bit the change that has happened in the last twenty years. I felt little short of despair when I heard of the project, and now I am a bit elated."³³

In the 1880s Morris (almost alone among progressive decorative artists in England) was full of enthusiasm for the revival of tapestry weaving. In a lecture at the first Arts and Crafts exhibition, he called it "the noblest of the weaving

arts."³⁴ He loved the crisp detail and rich colors of late-medieval tapestries, the hangings with scrolling foliage known as *verdures*, and the romantic quality of a room hung round with tapestries—stories told on the walls, foliage like an enchanted forest. In a sense, the earlier embroidered hangings had been leading up to this point. Burne-Jones shared his enthusiasm, and was crucial to this development, the history of tapestry being so closely allied to painting.³⁵ Morris taught himself tapestry weaving in 1879, and serious production began after the firm moved to workshops at Merton Abbey in Surrey in 1881. Burne-Jones, Morris, and the firm's workmen collaborated along the usual lines. Of the tapestries made from Burne-Jones's designs, seven were adapted from stained-glass cartoons and twelve were from new designs.

The tapestries woven for Stanmore Hall, in Middlesex, were the realization in a noble medium of one of the high themes of Morris's and Burne-Jones's imagination, the quest for the Holy Grail (fig. 18; cat. nos. 145, 147–51). In the 1850s and early 1860s this and other stories from Malory's *Morte d'Arthur* had inspired them to produce mainly small, intense

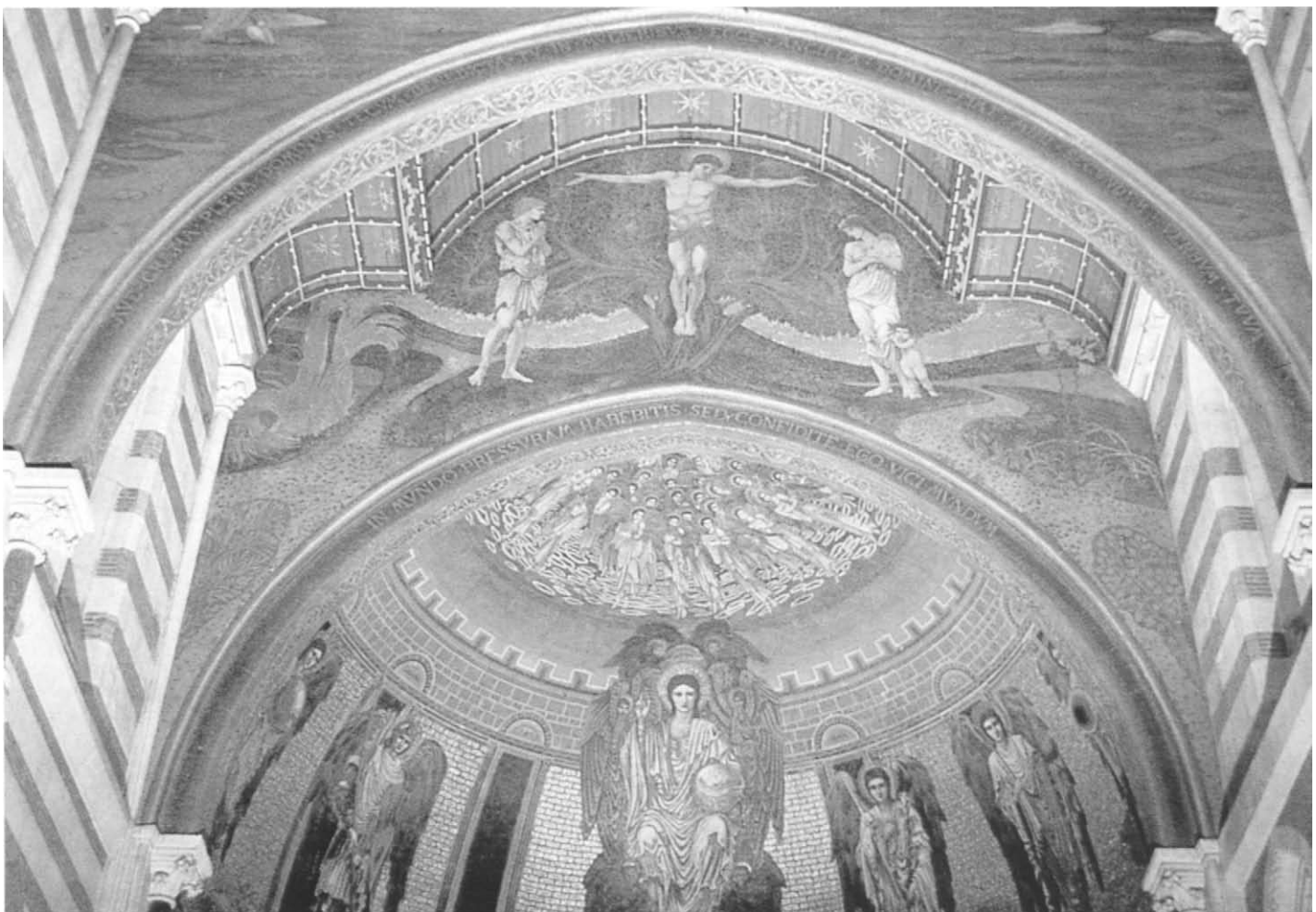


Figure 17. Edward Burne-Jones. Mosaic decorations in the apse and over the chancel, Saint Paul's Within-the-Walls, Rome, 1883–94 (see also fig. 98)

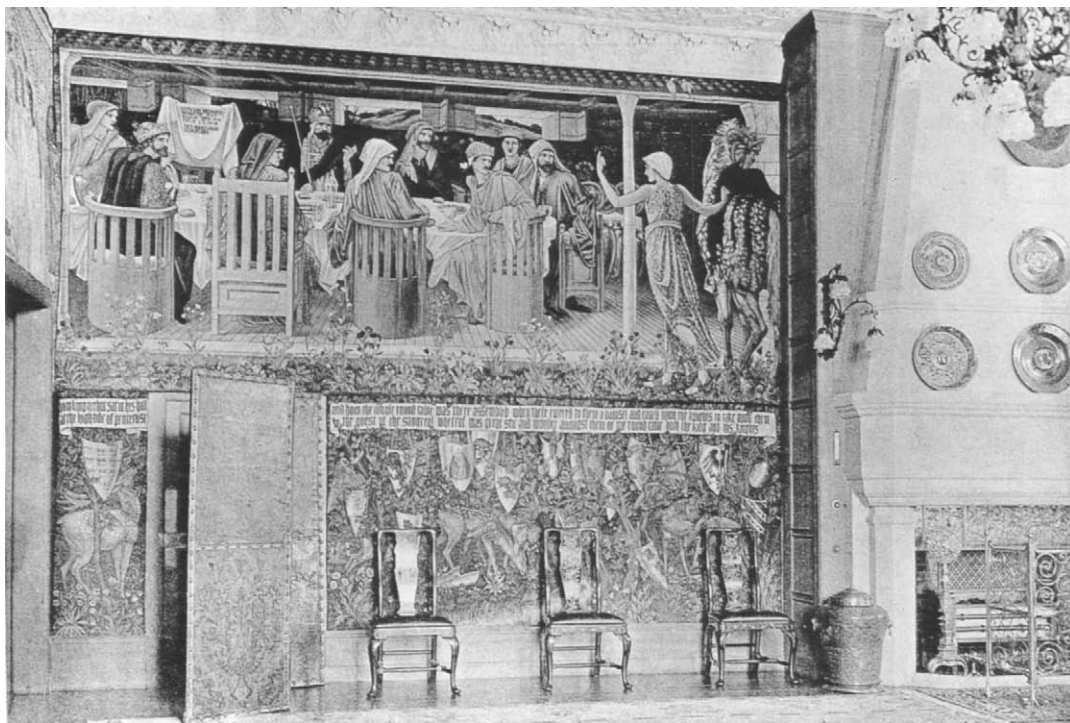


Figure 18. Morris & Company. The dining room at Stanmore Hall, Stanmore, Middlesex, showing the first panel of the Quest of the Holy Grail tapestries, *The Knights of the Round Table Summoned to the Quest by a Strange Damsel*, and two verdures, 1890–94

works—drawings by Burne-Jones, poems by Morris. Then other themes had intervened. Now, entering their sixties, they returned to the tale and set out one of the stories in six tapestry panels. But it was a story of a peculiar kind. When Edwin Austin Abbey painted the Grail legend for the Boston (Massachusetts) Public Library in the 1890s, he designed sixteen panels with battles and blessings, miracles and adventures. He told the story of a quest. Burne-Jones and Morris, by contrast, treated the story as a kind of tableau: two panels for the setting out, followed by *The Failure of Sir Lancelot* (sex), *The Failure of Sir Gawaine* (power), the *Ship of Solomon* (which carries the story over to Sarras, the spiritual world), and *The Attainment* (of the Grail by Sir Galahad, who personified innocence or purity of soul). Malory's wanderings and adventures have nearly all gone. The story is spare and moral, a tale from the end of life.³⁶

Late stained glass by Burne-Jones can be most easily surveyed in the fourteen windows at All Hallows Church, Allerton, in Liverpool, whose east window of 1875 we have already noted as a landmark in his middle-period glass. The transepts and west end received windows a few years later in the other middle-period manner, single figures with a narrative panel below. The chancel received two small windows in 1881, angels ascending and descending in pure blues, pinks, and reds, colors typical of his late glass. Then, between 1882 and 1887, came eight windows in the aisles, all of three lights and all on New Testament themes. The Baptism window of 1886–87 (fig. 19) demonstrates the features of the late style. The strong, linear composition spreads across the lights, challenging the mullions in a way that the 1875 Adoration of the Lamb had not.

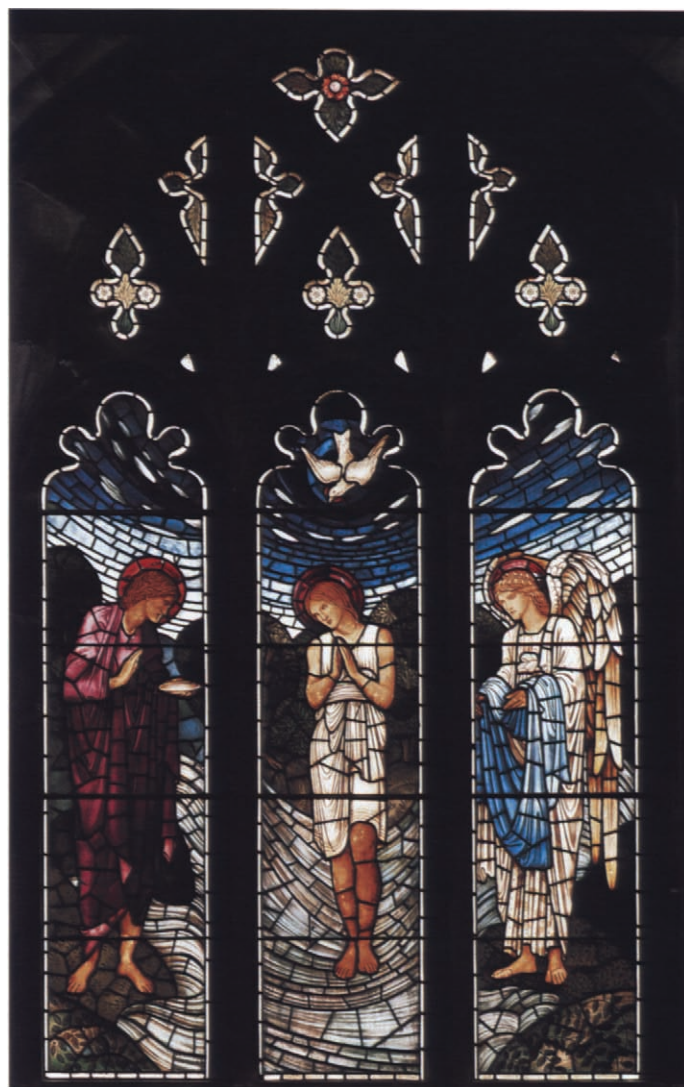


Figure 19. Morris & Company. Stained-glass window, north aisle, All Hallows Church, Allerton, Liverpool, 1886–87

The leading is arranged in decorative patterns, creating abstract effects in the sky and rhythmic billows in the River Jordan. These nave windows at Allerton are not necessarily the finest examples of Burne-Jones's late glass. But in them the counterpoint of stained glass against masonry, light against dark, which had been developing throughout his work, is made explicit. What is more, it no longer makes sense to think of Burne-Jones contributing the figures and Morris the backgrounds. With the possible exception of the Ascension of 1882, which has three figures against a background of foliage, figures and background are all by Burne-Jones.

In 1884 Burne-Jones designed an Ascension window for the chancel of Saint Philip's Church in Birmingham, not far from where he grew up. Designed by Thomas Archer, the church, now the Anglican cathedral, is a fine example of early-eighteenth-century Baroque, and it has tall, arched windows, without the mullions, lancets, and tracery of Gothic windows. The Ascension was followed by a Nativity and a Crucifixion in 1887, also for the chancel, and by a Last Judgment at the west end in 1896–97 (fig. 20). The Last Judgment is magnificent, though it is more epiphany than judgment. The city of this world collapses; Christ holds out his wounded hands; the messengers of the spirit hang in the air. Morris and Burne-Jones thought these windows their finest, and it is hard to disagree.³⁷ They are extraordinary. And because they come at the end of Burne-Jones's career, it is only too easy to suggest that they are the culmination of his stained-glass work, as if everything had led up to them. But they are not a culmination. They are a new departure. Burne-Jones had not treated large undivided windows in this way before.³⁸ And to argue, as some have done, that the success of the windows derives from the absence of mullions and tracery, which enabled the pictorial tendency in Burne-Jones's work at last to be given free play, is to place all his earlier work in a problematic light, for it implies that he had been working with Gothic windows all these years against the grain, as if the mullions had been prison bars.³⁹

But this was not so. From the start Burne-Jones liked to place his work in creative tension with the surrounding masonry: the darkness around the image was like night embracing the day. This was true at Bradfield. At Lyndhurst the scheme was frustrated by Philip Webb's taste for grisaille. It returned, however, triumphantly, at Easthampstead and Allerton in 1875. And in the late work at Allerton it was customary. The story of Burne-Jones's glass ends not with his second-to-last window, the Judgment at Birmingham, but with his last, the west window in the parish church at Hawarden in north Wales, erected in memory of W. E. Gladstone by his family in 1898 (fig. 21). Here, as at Bradfield



Figure 20. Morris & Company. Stained-glass window, west end, Saint Philip's Cathedral, Birmingham, 1896–97

so many years before, there is no margin around the individual lights. The manger fills the window. The Virgin lies in a stiff, Byzantine pose, her body cut in two by a mullion. Angels float across the tracery as if they were outside. The composition and the architectural frame clash more fiercely than ever. And out of the clash, out of the dark, comes the sense of Burne-Jones's imagery being suspended in light, as it had



Figure 21. Morris & Company. Stained-glass window, west end, Saint Deiniol's Church, Hawarden, Clwyd, 1897–98

been in all his windows of this kind. Medieval stained-glass makers believed that light comes from God; Burne-Jones's windows were perhaps designed in the shadow of that belief.

The last great enthusiasm of William Morris's life was the Kelmscott Press, the culmination of a lifelong interest in the arts of the book that included the *Earthly Paradise* project, his illuminated manuscripts of the 1870s, and his collecting of medieval manuscripts and early printed books.⁴⁰ In the late 1880s he designed the first of his own typefaces, and in 1891 he set up the Kelmscott Press to print and publish books of his choice. His first concerns were typographical—the layout of the page, a type that would print strong and black like the German books of the early sixteenth century. Most of the fifty-three titles he printed did not have illustrations. But Morris could not think of printing books without thinking of Burne-Jones, and there was the failure of *The Earthly Paradise* to be undone. W. H. Hooper, one of the last and most skilled of the mid-Victorian wood engravers, was brought out of retirement, and Burne-Jones's pencil drawings were carefully translated into bolder black and white before they were engraved.

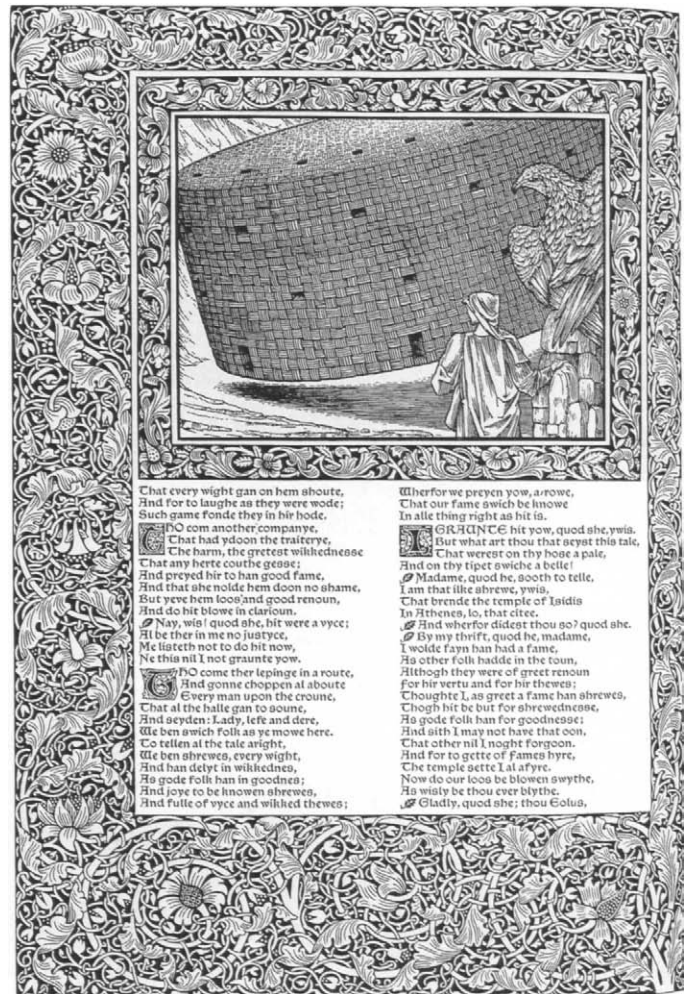


Figure 22. Edward Burne-Jones. Illustration for "The House of Fame," in *The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer*. The Kelmscott Press, 1896

In all, Burne-Jones drew about a hundred illustrations for the press, of which eighty-seven were for *The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer*. Compared with the illustrations Morris engraved for *The Story of Cupid and Psyche*, they are crisp, clean, and perhaps less touching. Here, as elsewhere in Burne-Jones's late work, one feels the slight loss involved in a design process that was working smoothly and thus provided no technical challenge.

The *Chaucer* was like the Holy Grail tapestries: an intimate collaboration between Morris and Burne-Jones, their masterpiece in that particular medium, and their tribute to an early master of their imagination. As in the tapestries, Burne-Jones's contribution was an edited version of the original. He did not like Chaucer's bawdy, humorous stories. Morris wanted him to illustrate *The Miller's Tale*, but he would not. He liked the sophisticated, melancholy poems of courtly love, and his illustrations concentrate on works like *Troilus and Criseyde*, *The Romaunt of the Rose*, and similar texts in *The Canterbury Tales*.

While working on the Chaucer illustrations, Burne-Jones wrote, "In the book I am putting myself wholly aside, and try-

ing to see things as he saw them; not once have I invaded his kingdom with one hostile thought.”⁴¹ That was impossible, of course. Illustrators always provide their own version of a story, and Chaucer often did not “see things” at all, particularly in the poems Burne-Jones chose to illustrate. But it is clear what he meant. He used his favorite imagery of knights in woods and maidens dancing in enclosed gardens. But when Chaucer gave him something both tangible and strange, like the horse of brass in “The Squire’s Tale,” he fixed on it and drew it as literally as he could. In “The House of Fame,” Chaucer describes the house as perpetually gyrating and “made of twigges.” It bumps into Burne-Jones’s illustration like a wicker spaceship (fig. 22). This is the physically exact rendered deep in the regions of the imagination.

We should not think of the Kelmscott Press as an ordinary publishing venture. Morris, in fact, deplored the flood of books released in his time by the new printing technology and the growth in literacy. He wanted fewer books, but those the best and printed in a manner that befitted them. That was the idea behind the limited editions of the press, with their heavy paper, dense black type, and elaborate scrolling ornaments. Indeed, at times his efforts seem more like embalming than publishing. As for Burne-Jones, the poignant, semimagical world of Chaucer and Malory had always fed his imagination, just because it was so different from Victorian England. He had neither the habit nor the inclination to make Chaucer accessible. It made more sense to him to underscore the poet’s strangeness. In December 1895 he wrote to a friend:

I have just finished my Chaucer work and in May I hope the book *will see the light*. I hope sincerely it will be all the age does not want—I have omitted nothing I could think of to obstruct the onward march of the world. The designs are carved in wood . . . the lines as thick as I could get them. I have done all I can to impede progress—you will always bear me witness that I have not faltered—and that having put my hand to the plough I invariably look back.⁴²

His tongue was not entirely in his cheek.

“I LOVE TO WORK IN THAT FETTERED WAY”

The *Chaucer* was indeed finished in May 1896 (and published in June). In October William Morris died. “There is never any looking forward again,” Burne-Jones wrote. “Morris really closed the chapter of my life.”⁴³ It is difficult to imagine what Burne-Jones’s life would have been like without Morris. His career as a decorative artist would probably have developed more slowly and more steadily, for it was often Morris’s enthusiasm and energy that created new projects, and it was

Morris’s feeling for techniques and materials that showed how Burne-Jones’s designs could be translated into stained glass, or wood engraving, or embroideries. He would certainly not have been so prolific, for it was Morris the businessman who kept him in almost permanent employment as a designer of stained glass. By the end of his life Burne-Jones had made more than 650 designs for stained glass, many of which were used more than once. When the Gladstone family asked him to design angels for the tracery of the west window at Hawarden, he protested, “I must by now have designed enough to fill Europe.”⁴⁴ But with or without Morris, he would certainly have been a decorative artist. Decorative art was too important in Gothic Revival and Pre-Raphaelite circles for him to have escaped it. And he loved it. Of his design for the Tree of Life mosaic, he wrote, “It’s one of those things I do outside painting, far away from it. It has more to do with architecture, and isn’t a picture a bit. . . . I love to work in that fettered way, and am better in a prison than in the open air always.”⁴⁵

I began this essay with another quotation about the Tree of Life design, chosen in a slightly combative spirit to show that Burne-Jones’s decorative art could be as important as his painting. I was thinking of the difference in status today

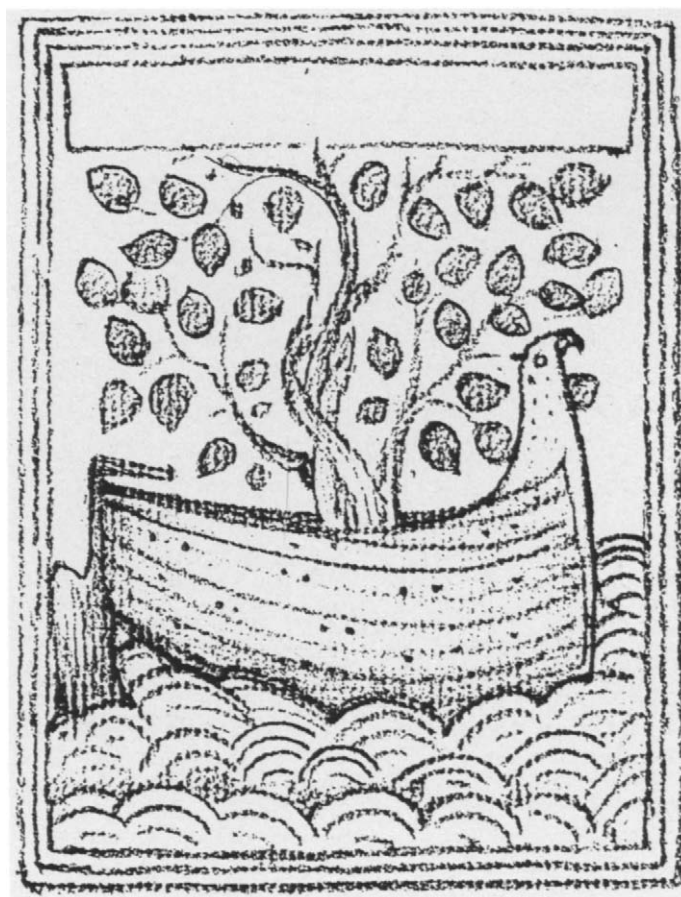


Figure 23. Edward Burne-Jones. Drawing, ca. 1890. Pencil, $4\frac{1}{2} \times 3\frac{3}{8}$ in. (11.4 \times 8.6 cm). British Museum, London

between fine and decorative art, and of readers who might see Burne-Jones as a painter who *also* produced decorative art. I wanted to make them take note. But I can see now, having surveyed the decorative work, that this difference of status was not a part of his world. For Burne-Jones decorative art was part of the same project as painting, though “far away from it.” It was an enlargement of his work, offering imaginative possibilities not available to him as a painter. This enlargement was not just a matter of the medium, of designing for glass, textiles, or wood engraving in addition to working in oil and watercolor. It was not just a matter of applied art, of bringing his imagination to bear on furniture and books and windows as well as on pictures. It was not a movement outward from his imaginative world at all, but a welcoming in. The peculiarity of his decorative art was not that it brought his imagination to bear upon everyday things, but that it brought everyday things to bear upon his imagination. That was the enlargement.

Burne-Jones created images that hung in colored light inside a church, or were wrapped around a room, or were engraved on wood and printed in a book in thick black ink so that they seemed (and were) as much a part of the story as the text. The rich and public character of ordinary life and the limitations of the medium gave his imagination reach. The ordinariness of things suggested thoughts to him that were large and sometimes strange. The troubling aura of the little piano he painted in 1860, the public statement of faith he made in the Tree of Life mosaic, the great *Chaucer* printed “to obstruct the onward march of the world”—these were meanings not available to him in painting.

The British Museum has a book of designs made by Burne-Jones between 1885 and 1898 which includes some very simple and finished drawings of objects. In one there is a tree growing out of a ship (fig. 23). The strange conjunction and the framed design recall the emblems popular in the Renaissance and the seventeenth century. The image is in one way ordinary and in another strange. It stands as an emblem of what is distinctive in Burne-Jones’s decorative art.

1. Lago 1981, p. 34.

2. Stained-glass windows designed by Burne-Jones can be seen in churches in many parts of the British Isles and elsewhere. For their locations, see Sewter 1974–75, vol. 2, and the *Buildings of England* architectural guides.

3. J. Mordaunt Crook, *William Burges and the High Victorian Dream* (London, 1981), pp. 294–300.

4. The principal surviving examples of early painted furniture by Burne-Jones are (1) A wardrobe designed by Philip Webb and painted by Burne-Jones in about 1858, probably as a wedding present for William and Jane Morris (Ashmolean Museum, Oxford). It shows the story of Saint Hugh, a child who went on singing in praise of the Virgin Mary long after his throat was cut. (2) A sideboard belonging to Burne-Jones and painted in the week before his wedding (June 9, 1860), with scenes

of women feeding, tormenting, and being tormented by various animals (Victoria and Albert Museum, London). (3) The upright piano discussed here, and painted in 1860 (Victoria and Albert Museum, London). (4) A settle in the hall at William Morris’s Red House, with doors painted about 1860 with scenes from the *Nibelungenlied*, one by Morris and the other by Burne-Jones (in situ). The Backgammon Players cabinet (cat. no. 18) stands a little apart from these more personal pieces, as it was made for the firm, presumably for exhibition and sale.

5. See Sewter 1974–75, vol. 1, pp. 13–15, vol. 2, pp. 1–4.

6. See, for example, *ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 14.

7. The standard work is Martin Harrison, *Victorian Stained Glass* (London, 1980).

8. Lago 1981, p. 27.

9. See, for example, Sewter 1974–75, especially vol. 1, pp. 23–25, 38, 42–43, 49–55.

10. *Memorials*, vol. 2, p. 109.

11. Prospectus for Morris, Marshall, Faulkner & Co., quoted in MacCarthy 1994, p. 172.

12. *Memorials*, vol. 1, p. 267.

13. *Ibid.*, pp. 254–56.

14. Burne-Jones had also studied Mantegna’s engravings in the British Museum, but the technique of the engravings is generally finer than the effect Morris and Burne-Jones were looking for.

15. Only one proof seems to have survived from this stage of the project, in the Pierpont Morgan Library in New York. See Pierpont Morgan Library 1976, pp. 116–17, pl. 58.

16. Exceptionally, the paired illustrations of Psyche’s entry among the gods, at the end of *Cupid and Psyche*, were drawn by Burne-Jones and cut by Morris in an outline style close to that of the *Hypnerotomachia*. An edition of William Morris, *The Story of Cupid and Psyche*, was printed by Will and Sebastian Carter at the Rampant Lions Press, using Morris’s Troy types and the original blocks cut by Morris and others, now in the possession of the Society of Antiquaries of London, and published by Clover Hill Editions of London and Cambridge in 1974.

17. Dunlap 1971 and A. R. Dufty’s introduction to Morris 1974 are detailed studies of the *Earthly Paradise* project.

18. Quoted in *Memorials*, vol. 2, p. 3.

19. The phrase *l’art pour l’art* was current in France in the first half of the nineteenth century. Walter Pater used the phrase “the love of art for art’s sake” in the last sentence of *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* (London, 1873), p. 313.

20. *Memorials*, vol. 1, p. 297, where Burne-Jones describes himself as sometimes bewildered by his own pictures: “I feel inclined to write to Mr. Burne-Jones and apologize for troubling him, but should be so grateful if he would tell me the hidden meaning of these pictures.”

21. Burne-Jones said that artists had “the power of bringing God into the world—making God manifest.” *Memorials*, vol. 2, p. 257.

22. Apart from two figure designs supplied by John Henry Dearle for windows at Glasgow University in 1893.

23. Harrison and Waters 1973, p. 116.

24. Quoted in Sewter 1974–75, vol. 2, p. 30.

25. *Ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 46.

26. *Memorials*, vol. 2, p. 6. From the mid-1870s, Burne-Jones appears to have used photography, at least on occasion, in the production of full-size cartoons. See Sewter 1974–75, vol. 2, pp. 44, 176–77, 228.

27. Parry 1983, p. 104.

28. Quoted in Barbara Morris, *Victorian Embroidery* (London, 1962), p. 113.

29. *Memorials*, vol. 2, p. 111. For a discussion of Burne-Jones and pianos, see Wilson 1972 and Wilson 1975.

30. *Memorials*, vol. 2, p. 13.

31. See Dormont 1978.

32. Another is the use of angels holding spheres as an image of the Days of Creation, used first in 1870 in the tracery lights of the west window at All Saints’ Church, Middleton Cheney, Northamptonshire. See Sewter 1974–75, vol. 1, p. 88.

33. *Memorials*, vol. 2, p. 190.

34. Quoted in Parry 1983, p. 100.
35. Georgiana Burne-Jones told F. G. Stephens that “those little Courts of Tapestry [at the South Kensington Museum] were almost like chapels to him—he often looked in just to see them and rejoice in their beauty” (letter of January 11, 1905, quoted in Lago 1981, p. 35).
36. The four stained-glass windows which Burne-Jones designed for his own house at Rottingdean in 1886 are an earlier, and even more extreme, example of this simplification of the Grail story (cat. nos. 145, 147–151).
37. In *A Note on the Morris Stained Glass Work* (London, n.d.), pp. 13–14, H. C. Marillier wrote that the chancel windows at Saint Philip’s “were reckoned by Morris and Burne-Jones as their greatest achievement in this field.” (Morris did not live to see the Last Judgment window.) For other high estimates of the windows, see De Lisle 1904, p. 157, and MacCarthy 1994, pp. 646–67.
38. The only comparably large windows are those in the north transept of H. H. Richardson’s Holy Trinity Church in Boston, which consist of small pictorial panels and angels set in scrolling foliage. The windows in Saint Peter’s, Vere Street, London, a church close in date to Saint Philip’s, are much smaller.
39. See, for example, Harrison and Waters 1973, the caption to colorplate 47: “Significantly, his greatest design is not encumbered by the mullions and traceries of a Gothic window. It allowed the picture-making tendency, implicit in his later designs, full expression.”
40. These topics are well covered in Pierpont Morgan Library 1976.
41. *Memorials*, vol. 2, p. 217.
42. Quoted in Peterson 1991, p. 252.
43. *Memorials*, vol. 2, pp. 305–6.
44. Quoted in Sewter 1974–75, vol. 2, p. 91.
45. *Memorials*, vol. 2, p. 159.

Edward Burne-Jones and France

LAURENCE DES CARS

THE ORIGINS OF BURNE-JONES'S RECOGNITION IN FRANCE

Edward Burne-Jones, together with George Frederic Watts, was the most celebrated contemporary English painter in France at the end of the nineteenth century. This popularity and the forms that it assumed, as well as its possible ramifications, can best be explained by considering the aesthetic, literary, and artistic milieu in England and France at the time. To understand how Burne-Jones was perceived by the art world in France we should keep in mind that, traditionally, English painting was not very well known in France and had always been considered essentially different and strange. This perception, which one finds in nearly all French texts that deal with the English school, often exhibits a certain condescension on the part of the country that was at the center of the European art world. Indeed, the “exoticism” of English art necessarily relegated it to a position that was, at best, marginal. In 1882 the critic Ernest Chesneau (1833–1890) reported the shock experienced at the discovery of the modern English school—the Pre-Raphaelites—and the interest it generated at the Expositions Universelles: “The English painters made their first appearance on the Continent at the palace on the Avenue Montaigne in 1855. It was for us the revelation of an art whose existence we had not even suspected. . . . Upon entering the galleries devoted to the English school in our three great international expositions of 1855, 1867, and 1878, the impression was of seeing something striking and unexpected—and not particularly agreeable.”¹ This initial reaction, which clearly oscillated between fascination and rejection, made a lasting, if not permanent, impression on the critical reception of English painters in France, and the case of Burne-Jones was no exception.² Another difference that was noted was the school’s eminently national character: “The English school as a whole—and I do not mean this as a criticism—is constituted on a principle of exclusivity that seems on occasion excessive; it is a truly national art.”³

The radical aesthetics of Pre-Raphaelitism advanced the idea of a specifically English contemporary art that had no direct link with painting on the Continent. Although the movement was fairly well defined historically and involved

only a small group of artists, the term “Pre-Raphaelitism” was used rather loosely in France. Providing a convenient label for a little-known art, it came to be synonymous with English painting in general until the end of the century.⁴ “The Pre-Raphaelite school! Everyone speaks of it as if it had only just been discovered. Yet the [Brotherhood] was dissolved nearly forty years ago, so that each [artist] could go his separate way. Everyone talks about it, but who really knows it?”⁵

Philippe Burty (1830–1890) was among the first major critics to take a serious interest in English painting. He developed his ideas about the Pre-Raphaelite movement in an article that appeared in the *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* in 1869, writing, “For the English school, it provided an opportunity for renewal which Realism was incapable of providing [for us],” but immediately qualifying his statement by adding, “It led first to some eccentricity, then to some weariness.” In the same text Burty introduced Edward Burne-Jones to the French public, presenting him as the young champion of the movement. He mentioned a visit to the painter’s studio in which he was able “to study his work more thoroughly, having already been struck by some works on other trips.” He also reported on Burne-Jones’s contribution to the 1869 exhibition of the Old Water-Colour Society. *The Wine of Circe* (fig. 24) he described as “a painting of the highest value, both for the impression it gives—which, though troubling, is more wholesome than certain parts of Baudelaire’s *Fleurs du Mal*—and for its masterly execution. It is on this basis that this gifted artist must be judged.”⁶ The comparison with Charles Baudelaire (1821–1867), which Burty so subtly underscores, is significant, for it highlights from the outset the importance of the artist’s literary and poetic inspiration and its pictorial transcription while at the same time it establishes a direct link with the most productive aesthetic discourse in France at the time. Although to a lesser degree than in *The Lament* (cat. no. 44), in *The Wine of Circe* Burne-Jones seems to have come the closest to the Aesthetic movement championed by Frederic Leighton (1830–1896) and James Abbott McNeill Whistler (1834–1903) in the 1860s. Indeed, in works such as

these Burne-Jones subscribed to the necessity of freeing art from all documentary and narrative content. He continued to develop ideas along this line throughout his career. Such ideas, which have all too often been lumped under the heading “art for art’s sake,” were developed first in France by Théophile Gautier (1811–1872) and then by Baudelaire; and it was in France that Leighton and Whistler became acquainted with these concepts before introducing and developing them in England. There may have been direct contacts between the French and the English along these same lines. We know, for example, that Stéphane Mallarmé (1842–1898) resided in London in 1862–63. Mallarmé met Algernon Charles Swinburne at that time and later contributed to the *Athenaeum*. Burne-Jones was sensitive to these speculations—which one could term pre-Symbolist—lending to them an intriguing personal resonance. *The Wine of Circe* already expressed an anxiety about the period combined with a critique of the materialism of modern life, and contributed to the elaboration of the image of woman as evil and bewitching.⁷ These last two themes, which were at the center of the developing Symbolist culture in late-nineteenth-century Europe, were embraced by Burne-Jones from the very beginning of his career and were responsible in large measure for his popularity in France.

Nevertheless, it was not until 1877 that the progressive and informed discovery of Burne-Jones in France finally took hold. This was the year of the first exhibition held at the Grosvenor Gallery, London, founded by Sir Coutts Lindsay. The gallery’s purpose was to establish an alternative to the Royal Academy and its outdated policies and to exhibit works

specifically by artists rejected by the Academy. Although it sparked much controversy, the exhibition served as a kind of consecration of Burne-Jones. *The Beguiling of Merlin* (cat. no. 64) provoked much discussion and assured him a secure position in the art world. In this painting Burne-Jones transcended the Arthurian legend, creating a fascinating and disquieting new imagery whose counterpart in France at the time could be found only in the work of Gustave Moreau (1826–1898). The exhibition also included works by many foreign artists—the American Whistler, the Dutchman Lawrence Alma-Tadema, the Frenchman James Tissot, and Moreau, who was represented by *The Apparition* (fig. 25).⁸

One of the men responsible for the presence of this seminal Symbolist picture in London was Joseph Comyns Carr, a writer, playwright, and critic whose texts were published both in England and in France. Comyns Carr, deputy director of the Grosvenor Gallery, was one of the most remarkable personalities involved in the dissemination of English art in France. As English correspondent for the journal *L’Art*, he wrote a landmark text that established Burne-Jones as the leading painter on the English scene: “The major event of the art season in London this year was the exhibition of the work of Mr. Burne-Jones at the Grosvenor Gallery. . . . One attempts to explain what it is that is so strange to the English public about Mr. Burne-Jones’s efforts. The English were not accustomed to seeing so much intensity and imagination combined. . . . For the first time in the history of the school, here is an artist who is striving to raise English art to the same heights as English literature and to expand the same horizons.”⁹



Figure 24. Edward Burne-Jones, *The Wine of Circe*, 1863–69. Watercolor and body-color, 27½ × 40 in. (70 × 101.5 cm). Private collection



Figure 25. Gustave Moreau (1826–1898), *The Apparition*, ca. 1876. Watercolor, 41 $\frac{3}{8}$ x 28 $\frac{3}{8}$ in. (105 x 72 cm). Musée du Louvre, Département des Arts Graphiques, on loan to the Musée d'Orsay, Paris



Figure 26. Adolphe Lalauze (1838–1906). Engraving after Edward Burne-Jones, *The Beguiling of Merlin* (cat. no. 64)

The message to the Parisian art world could not have been made more explicit: if the work of any English artist could equal the most ambitious paintings of French artists, it was that of Edward Burne-Jones. The article was illustrated by an engraved reproduction of *The Beguiling of Merlin* (fig. 26), a forerunner of the many reproductions, published both in books and as single prints, that helped Burne-Jones to achieve his reputation. Indeed, the artist called on the services of the photographer Frederick Hollyer (1837–1933) very early on to establish a nearly exhaustive photographic record of his work. However limited the medium, these high-quality reproductions were the only means by which many artists came to know Burne-Jones's work. In quite a few cases in exhibitions in France and Belgium they even took the place of the originals. They were also prized by such admirers as the Belgian Symbolist painter Fernand Khnopff (1858–1921) and by connoisseurs like Marcel Proust (1871–1922). The latter, describing the apartments of Madame de Lavardin in the posthumously published *Jean Santeuil* (1952), noted that without the

influence of the Duchesse des Alpes, “Burne-Jones would not have taken up so much wall space,” and “Loisel . . . even filled the room of the old Madame Loisel with reproductions by Burne-Jones.”¹⁰

Comyns Carr was instrumental in having *The Beguiling of Merlin* recognized in France as one of the first post-Pre-Raphaelite masterpieces and as a key work in the new aesthetic dialogue that was developing, with his enthusiastic support, between the two countries. The dialogue continued and expanded the following year at the 1878 Exposition Universelle, in which British painting was represented primarily by works from the inaugural exhibition at the Grosvenor Gallery. This was a decisive event in the dissemination of contemporary British painting on the Continent, and of Burne-Jones's work in particular. Along with *The Beguiling of Merlin* and two other works by Burne-Jones, *Love Disguised as Reason* (1870; cat. no. 47) and *Love among the Ruins* (1870; private collection),¹¹ the public could admire Watts's *Love and Death* (1874–77; Whitworth Art Gallery,

University of Manchester) and Walter Crane's *The Renaissance of Venus* (1877; Tate Gallery, London).

This exhibition gave many art lovers the opportunity to see Burne-Jones's work and made a lasting impression on such artists as Moreau and Khnopff. The discovery of this painting of ideas and allusive atmospheres was summarized by the critic Charles Blanc (1813–1882): "To my mind, the most surprising picture from London is the one by Burnes Jones [*sic*], *Merlin and Vivien*. It expresses the quintessence of the ideal and a sublimated poetry that are deeply touching. The painter's Vivien seems to have been conjured by an incantation; she is like a figure by Mantegna, retouched and lovingly enveloped by the brush of Prud'hon."¹²

TWO ASPECTS OF THE RECOGNITION: DECADENT AND SYMBOLIST

The following decade, 1878–89, saw the progressive appropriation of Burne-Jones's then-known work by the Parisian Symbolists and Decadents. The increasingly frequent references to the English painter had two sides: on the one hand, a form of identification, sometimes fairly superficial, with a decadent culture, and on the other, an acknowledgment of common concerns and ends—if not means—in the elaboration of the Symbolist aesthetic. French critics began to review with regularity the various exhibitions in which he participated, although, significantly enough, the interpretations tended to harp on the more extreme aspects of his work. Morbidity, anxiety, and a hermetic subject matter were the most frequently mentioned traits, and a link with Moreau was quickly established. Edmond Duranty (1833–1880), for example, wrote in 1879: "Mr. Burne-Jones has triumphed at the Grosvenor Gallery. His works are imbued with a subtle poetry, a morbid sentimentality, and a deliberate strangeness. . . . His art is characterized by a keen languor. . . . In four other pictures he has elaborated a poem around Pygmalion and Galatea full of hints and suggestions reminiscent of the complexities of M. Gustave Moreau. . . . There is a sort of hesitancy in these pictures, and their titles are shrouded in vagueness."¹³ Ernest Chesneau published his superb *Artistes anglais contemporains* in 1882 and, concerning Burne-Jones, wrote: "Our aesthetic in France is surely less subtle, and less complex. But is this a sufficient reason to condemn efforts at Symbolist and mystical expression in the art of our neighbors. . . . Why should the artist be deprived of the quite noble delight of enhancing the sensual pleasures of the eye with the emotion of higher thought?"¹⁴

This interpretation of Burne-Jones, crediting him with subtle literary and poetic intentions and a refined pictorial handling while giving him the benefit of the doubt as to the

depths of meaning conveyed by his mysteries, was immediately picked up by the Parisian Decadents. Sufficient evidence of this can be found in the brief but significant passage which Joris-Karl Huysmans (1848–1907) devoted to English painting in *À Rebours* (Against Nature; 1884), his novel about the extravagant aestheticism of the fin de siècle:

He [the protagonist of the novel, Jean des Esseintes] recalled certain examples he had seen in the international exhibitions and imagined he would perhaps see them again in London: pictures by [John Everett] Millais, an "Eve of Saint Agnes" of a silvery, almost lunar, green; works by Watts with strange colors, blends of gamboge and indigo; pictures conceived by an ailing Gustave Moreau, brushed by an anemic, and retouched by a Raphael drowned in blue; among other pictures, he remembered a "Denunciation of Cain," an "Ida" and some "Eves" displaying the singular and mysterious blend of these three masters and expressing the personality both quintessential and raw of a dreamy, erudite Englishman haunted by fantasies of atrocious colors.¹⁵

This exacerbated sensitivity, which Huysmans heightened to the extreme for the sake of his characterization, explains the strong appeal that this cryptic, and thus elitist, painting must have had. Together with the works of Odilon Redon (1840–1916) and Moreau, the only contemporary French artists of whom des Esseintes approved, this was the only type of painting befitting so forsaken an era.

It was in this spirit that the aesthete Count Robert de Montesquiou (1855–1921), accompanied by the painter and writer Jacques-Émile Blanche (1861–1942), made his first trip to London in 1884, the year of the publication of *À Rebours*. In so doing he was following the advice of the painter Paul Helleu (1859–1927), who had told him that this was "absolutely the place to go,"¹⁶ and he returned there in the summer of 1885 with Samuel Pozzi and Edmond de Polignac. For this occasion the American John Singer Sargent (1856–1925) had written a letter of introduction to Henry James which said, "I suppose that Montesquiou will want to see as much of Rossetti's and Burne-Jones's work as he can. I have given him a card for the Comyns Carrs and for Alma-Tadema."¹⁷ James seems to have done his duty, for he wrote to Montesquiou, "We shall see as many Burne-Joneses and Rossettis as possible."¹⁸

A further example of this trend was the poem that Jean Lorrain wrote in homage to Burne-Jones. It was published in 1887 in *Griseries*, in a section entitled "Le Coin des esthètes," which also included dedications to Louis Abbéma, Paul Bourget, Huysmans, des Esseintes, and Moreau. The poem dedicated to Moreau, "Printemps classique," was a counter-piece to the one dedicated to Burne-Jones, "Printemps mys-

tique.” The last lines give an idea of the atmosphere of fantasy evoked by Burne-Jones’s work, possibly because of—if not thanks to—the previously mentioned “misunderstanding”:

The pale gold of the chrysanthemums
Flares, yellow and sulfurous,
in a sky of pallid clouds,
Dispersed by gusts of pain.¹⁹

Thus the passionate historical and sociological climate that imbued Burne-Jones’s reception in France. It led in the 1880s to the perception of Burne-Jones as one of the precursors of Symbolism, and for the younger generation of artists he was endowed with the same aura and significance as Watts, Puvis de Chavannes (1824–1898), and Moreau. When Jean Moréas wrote his “Manifeste du symbolisme,” which appeared in *Le Figaro* in September 1886, he not only emphasized the literary principles of the movement but consecrated those tendencies in the pictorial arts that had been evident for several years. Yet there were so many ramifications of the movement, and its forms of expression were so varied, that it was extremely difficult actually to define it. Typically there was a need to assert differences, and advocates regularly issued their own attempts to reveal its quintessential meaning. Among the most comprehensive were those by Gustave Kahn (published in *L’Événement* in 1886), Édouard Dujardin (published in *La Revue Indépendante* in 1888), and Albert Aurier (published in *Le Mercure de France* in 1891), which took its starting point from an analysis of the work of Paul Gauguin. The Symbolists championed the revelation of ideas through poetic or aesthetic sensation independent of stylistic imperatives and made constant reference to literature and to the most advanced philosophical, religious, and scientific thinking of the times. Although pursued with less intensity and normative “rigor,” this redefinition of thought and its expression was taking place in England at the same time through the agency of Walter Pater (1839–1894) and Arthur Symonds (1865–1945). Given this context, the works of Burne-Jones and Watts, along with their literary and philosophical backgrounds, could very well lend credence to the idea of a convergence, if not concomitance, between the Symbolism of the English and the Symbolism of the French.

The Symbolists often defined themselves *a contrario*, setting themselves primarily against the advocates of Naturalism and Impressionism, who, by their subject matter and aesthetic handling, expressed the rampant materialism of modern society.²⁰ Interestingly enough it was a French critic, Édouard Rod, who found this tendency represented in the works of Dante Gabriel Rossetti, William Holman Hunt, and Burne-Jones: “In my opinion, their work remains the best protest that artists and thinkers have ever voiced against the vulgar com-

mercialism, self-satisfied platitudes and petty talents to be seen in most of modern art.”²¹ The theorist and critic Joséphin [Sâr] Péladan (1858–1918) was among those who conducted a veritable propaganda campaign to reinvest the image with import, to express a specifically modern consciousness by means of literary, legendary, and mythological themes. In the rules governing the Salons of the Rose + Croix, the mystical fraternity he co-founded in 1888, he rejected any number of iconographic categories in favor of “the Catholic Ideal and the Mystical . . . Legend, Myth, Allegory, the Dreamworld, Paraphrase and lyricism in general, with a preference for murals because they are of a superior essence.”²² And so it is not surprising that Burne-Jones was among the artists he wanted to invite to the Salons of the Rose + Croix at the beginning of the 1890s. Given this literary and critical climate, in which genuine affinities were mixed with Anglophiliac affectation, Paris by 1889 was fully prepared to celebrate a figure for which it been yearning for a decade.

THE 1889 EXPOSITION UNIVERSELLE

Burne-Jones was represented at the 1889 Exposition Universelle by *King Cophetua and the Beggar Maid* (cat. no. 112), a painting that drew considerably more attention than did the work of Watts and Millais. This event marked the true beginning of Burne-Jones’s relations with France. The critic Antonin Proust (1832–1905) applauded his contribution unreservedly: “Burne-Jones, the most interesting of the Pre-Raphaelites, transcribed the figure of King Cophetua from Tennyson’s ballad ‘The Beggar Maid’ with extraordinary power. The picture, with its compelling line, strong color scheme, and harmonious composition, and with its loving references to Carpaccio and Mantegna, has an enduring appeal.”²³ Moreau, a member of the jury, arranged for Burne-Jones to receive a gold medal. The English painter was also awarded the cross of the Légion d’honneur and named a corresponding member of the Académie des Beaux-Arts. Moreau also seems to have tried to contact Burne-Jones directly, obtaining his address from the collector and writer Charles Ephrussi,²⁴ and in 1892, through a common friend, Margaret, Lady Brooke, he received from him in 1892 a framed photographic reproduction of the six watercolors that constitute *The Days of Creation* (fig. 27). Moreau’s letter of thanks to Burne-Jones, dated April 12, 1892, was couched in the most effusive terms: “Dear Sir and Illustrious Master, You have made me so happy, so proud; I wish to thank you from the bottom of my heart. Through your noble and admirable friend Lady Brook[e], you have sent me a photograph reproducing one of your exquisite works, which is a veritable delight for the spirit. How thoughtful of you, this fine and



Figure 27. Framed photograph of Edward Burne-Jones, *The Days of Creation*, 1872–76 (fig. 79)

charming gift! May I assure you that this expression of your sympathy is precious to me on many counts and that it is one of the most rare and beautiful rewards that I have received in my long life of work.”²⁵ Although these superlatives perhaps conceal a certain insincerity,²⁶ the reciprocal admiration and



Figure 28. Gustave Moreau (1826–1898). *Death and the Woodcutter*, ca. 1881. Watercolor, 10½ × 8 in. (26.7 × 20.2 cm). Private collection

esteem of the two artists is nevertheless attested by Burne-Jones’s influence on the French painter’s work. An example of this may be seen in one of Moreau’s watercolor drawings illustrating “Death and the Woodcutter,” from the *Fables* of La Fontaine (fig. 28), in which the passive male figure and the dominant, entwining female figure present analogies with corresponding figures in *The Beguiling of Merlin*, which Moreau had seen in 1878.²⁷ Other works by Moreau clearly display the influence of Burne-Jones: *Orestes and the Erinyes* (fig. 29) owes much to *King Cophetua* in its spatial construction, heavy decor, and dark, metallic palette. The grouping of the figures and the imposing presence of the main female figure in *The Glorification of Helen* (fig. 30) could well allude to *The Wheel of Fortune* (cat. no. 52) and *The Depths of the Sea* (cat. no. 119), both exhibited in Paris in 1893. Both painters also used the common compositional device of isolating one part of a larger work from its original context and developing it independently. Probably the best-known example in Burne-Jones’s work is the Troy triptych (cat. no. 50).

Another French artist with whom Burne-Jones seems to have been in contact during the early 1890s was Pierre Puvis de Chavannes; unfortunately, some of their correspondence has been lost. As president of the Société Nationale des Beaux-Arts, Puvis hoped that Burne-Jones would participate in the exhibition of 1892 with *The Wheel of Fortune*. To quote from his letter: “Most Eminent Master, The promise of your glorious participation in our exhibition at the Champ de Mars is a source of great and sincere personal joy, and the graciousness and insistence with which your noble friend Lady Brooke made this promise is, for me, a most precious guarantee. It is my fervent wish that you might intervene to secure a picture that one of your friends [Arthur Balfour]

has the good fortune to own. As for drawings, we would consider them also as an expression of the deepest, purest and highest art."²⁸

The Wheel of Fortune was not, however, exhibited in Paris; in its place were twelve drawings—one of which was a study for the figure of the goddess in *The Wheel of Fortune*, one for *Desiderium* (cat. no. 62), and two of the ornamental initials for Virgil's *Aeneid* (Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge). Two notes of thanks for the drawings by Puvis have been preserved. The first reads: "Thank you from the bottom of my painter's heart for your powerful and original symbol of Fortune. Like everyone whom I invited to see it, I was deeply impressed by its sense of grandeur." The second: "I have just received and admired your drawings. They are an invaluable contribution to our exhibition, and I wish to thank you personally and on behalf of my fellow artists for having honored us in this way."²⁹ Here again, one is struck by the writer's admiring and respectful tone. Yet it should be noted that for none of these occasions did Burne-Jones make the trip to France. Puvis had hoped to see him in Paris in 1895, but the meeting never took place.³⁰ And in any event, this was also the period in which the unfortunate visits of his French admirers annoyed Burne-Jones to such an extent that he wrote to his friend Helen Gaskell: "William [Morris] announces 'It's the French,' as though it were the Battle of Hastings."³¹

The years 1889–94 marked the peak of Burne-Jones's popularity in France, as demonstrated by the acquisition of his works by the French national museums. Léonce Bénédict, curator of the Musée du Luxembourg, advocated this policy after the 1892 Salon of the Société Nationale des Beaux-Arts. Burne-Jones offered to give four drawings, a gift that was accepted in 1892. In the end, however, he sent only three (cat. no. 53). As a token of thanks he was given a Sèvres porcelain vase inscribed with his initials. The vase was accompanied by a letter from Bénédict that mentioned the three paintings shown at the Champ de Mars which he had presented to the purchase committee, composed of "our most important artists." "One does not know," he wrote, "if one's preference should go to the *Perseus* [*Perseus and the Graiae*, cat. no. 89] or to the *Siren* [*The Depths of the Sea*, cat. no. 119], but while one may argue about preferences, they were unanimously admired. We immediately spoke of acquiring these pictures. I put a damper on the general enthusiasm by pointing out that they no longer belonged to you, but I made up for it by announcing that I had your assurance that, in the foreseeable future, your work would be represented at the Luxembourg in a more impressive fashion than by the three drawings which we owe to your generosity."³² Bénédict's wish was never realized, but it serves as an indication of the extent of Burne-Jones's official recognition.

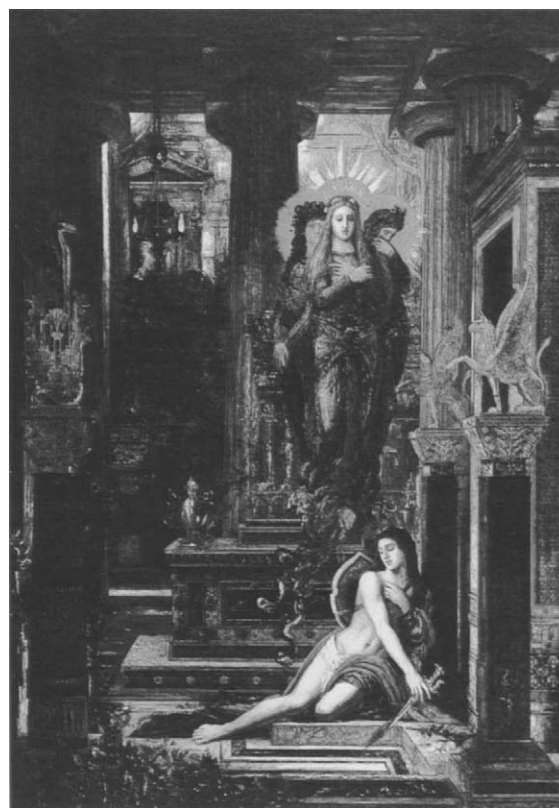


Figure 29. Gustave Moreau (1826–1898), *Orestes and Erinyes*, 1892. Oil on canvas, 70⁷/₈ × 47¹/₄ in. (180 × 120 cm). Private collection



Figure 30. Gustave Moreau (1826–1898), *The Glorification of Helen*, 1897. Watercolor, 4 × 5¹/₈ in. (10 × 13 cm). Musée Gustave Moreau, Paris



Figure 31. Edward Burne-Jones, *Baronne Deslandes*, 1896. Oil on canvas, 45³/₄ × 23 in. (116.2 × 58.4 cm). Private collection

Burne-Jones sent works to the 1892, 1893, 1895, and 1896 Salons of the Société Nationale des Beaux-Arts, and was also approached by Péladan to participate in the Salons of the Rose + Croix. In doing so, Péladan was making good his intention, announced in his “Manifesto” published in *Le Figaro*: “We will go to London to invite Burne-Jones, Watts and the five Pre-Raphaelites.” Burne-Jones seems to have been somewhat disconcerted by Péladan’s eccentricity, confiding his impressions in a letter to Watts.³³ In the end, it seems that only photographic reproductions were shown. Péladan nevertheless persisted in his admiration, writing in 1895 that Moreau was “the only artist comparable in stature to the creator of *The Golden Stairs* [cat. no. 109] and *The Fountain of Youth* [Tate Gallery, London].”³⁴

About 1894–95 a certain weariness with Burne-Jones began to be expressed among the critics in the circle of the Decadents. Péladan attributed this to the paucity of exhibi-

tions then showing his work.³⁵ But sympathy for Burne-Jones diminished, and opportunities for collaboration in France decreased. The author of the program for *La Belle au bois dormant* (The Sleeping Beauty), for example, a play by Henry Bataille and Robert d’Humières, which premiered at the important avant-garde Théâtre de l’Oeuvre on May 24, 1894, claimed that the costumes had been designed by Burne-Jones and Rochegrosse. We know, however, that Burne-Jones collaborated on only two theater productions, and this was not one of them.³⁶ A collaboration between Burne-Jones and the director of the Théâtre, Aurélien Lugné-Poe, would indeed have been fascinating, but this appears to have been one of those unfortunate *rendez-vous manqués*. The costume for the title role seems to have been only inspired by Burne-Jones rather than designed by him. Moreover, the illustration in the program was actually a facsimile of an etching taken from *L’Estampe Originale* reproducing *The Rose Bower* (cat. no. 58) from the Briar Rose cycle, and not a work done specifically for the play. The main attraction seems to have been a set design representing a thicket of thorns inspired by the Briar Rose series and by *Love among the Ruins*. The play was in any event a complete flop and received virtually no critical response.³⁷

When in 1896 Burne-Jones exhibited his portrait of the Baroness Deslandes (fig. 31), an Egeria of the Aesthetes and a fervent admirer of the artist,³⁸ it was given a very cool reception. This is clearly not one of his better portraits, but one iconographic detail is notable: in the sitter’s hands the artist placed a crystal ball, alluding to the iconography of his 1865 watercolor *Astrologia* (private collection) and introducing a major Symbolist theme, the mirror.³⁹

The dissenting voices continued to gain in volume. Among the first was Montesquiou, who nonetheless expressed his disenchantment in moderate terms: “Burne-Jones’s muse did smile upon me at one time, and I answered her with tender gazes and with poetry, but today she appears to me with silvery hair, somewhat bland and remote. . . . All is irises and rhinestones . . . yet if Burne-Jones’s pictures turned out to be nothing but sublime giant Christmas cards, many *youngsters* would continue to delight in them—and they would be right.”⁴⁰ The jaded dandy’s barb notwithstanding, in the same text he rightly points out the importance of decoration as an integral part of Burne-Jones’s painting and in his creative process.

The fiercest critic was Octave Mirbeau (1850–1917), who wrote an article that appeared in *Le Journal* entitled “Toujours des lys” (Always Lilies), in which Kariste, a repentant aesthete and Decadent painter, declares, “I too once cried out, ‘O Burne-Jones!’ with tearful, ecstatic eyes and prayerful lips! It is true that I had no contact with him, and that I was proclaiming my adoration on the strength of enthusiastic aesthetes who were even less acquainted with him! . . . As for

Burne-Jones, he is becoming increasingly ensnared in the labyrinth of his own symbols."⁴¹

Favorable articles continued to appear, but they were not so much enthusiastic declarations as more thorough, descriptive studies of a scholarly nature written with more distance and without the intention of ranking Burne-Jones among his French contemporaries. One such author was Paul Leprieux, the first of whose many articles devoted to Burne-Jones was published in the *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* in 1892. Entitled "Burne-Jones, Décorateur et ornemaniste," the article had the merit of providing French readers with a recapitulation of the artist's career in all its diversity. In 1893 Leprieux reviewed the major retrospective held at the New Gallery in the winter of 1892–93⁴² and established a connection between Burne-Jones and Puvis de Chavannes: "Several portraits, . . . which he treats in an idealized manner, not unlike Puvis de Chavannes when he works in this genre, synthesizing, simplifying, distilling the essence of the sitter and of life." He also devoted a long article to *Perseus and the Graiae* in which he remarked that the artist's innovative pictorial handling placed it among the most significant works of the day. On the other hand, as early as 1892 Robert de la Sizeranne (1866–1932) noted the growing rift between the French Symbolists, who were turning to new pictorial idioms (Cloisonnisme and Divisionism, for example), and the English painters, with their relative inertia, especially insofar as their literary sources were concerned; indeed, though the two schools had originally been quite similar in their objectives, the direction taken by the English painters condemned them to obsolescence.⁴³

BELGIUM: WAY STATION OR PLACE OF TRUE RECOGNITION?

Burne-Jones's reception in France, and the varied influences that it generated, cannot be dissociated from his reception in Belgium. The two countries were closely linked at this time by an active network of literary and artistic exchange.⁴⁴ Furthermore, as the hub of European culture, Belgium may well have been the venue for the realization of the most idealistic aspirations of the Symbolists.⁴⁵ The supremacy of the imagination in painting was described by the critic Émile Verhaeren (1855–1916) in these terms: "The greatest artist of any given era is the one in whose mind the ideal of the times takes its highest flights. In the course of the centuries we have seen painters emerge with, as it were, prominent and illuminated heads. These were the greats, in comparison to whom the likes of Courbet simply do not rate. Their names were Angelico, Botticelli, Rembrandt, Delacroix. Those who today express our more complex aspirations are called Chavannes, Moreau, Watts, Burne-Jones."⁴⁶



Figure 32. Edward Burne-Jones, *Study of a Woman*, 1890. Charcoal and red chalk, heightened with white, 12³/₈ × 9¹/₄ in. (31.4 × 23.5 cm). Private collection

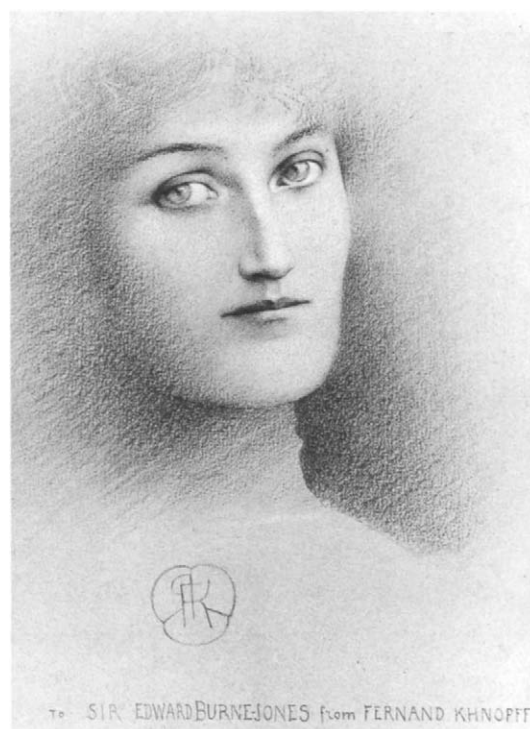


Figure 33. Fernand Khnopff (1858–1921), *Study for a Sphinx*, 1896. Pencil heightened with white, 9 × 5⁷/₈ in. (23 × 15 cm). Private collection

Because of its geographical location and cultural significance, Belgium was a major center for the dissemination of artistic forms between England and France at the end of the nineteenth century. In the case of Burne-Jones, however, it was more complex. The Belgian Symbolists, more strongly idealistic than their French counterparts, were quick to recognize the English painter as more a master than an equal, and they would absorb his influence for a long time to come, perhaps even until the advent of the Surrealists. The idea that the artist's critical fall from favor in France after 1894 had much to do with the vicissitudes of *snobisme* and fashion was expressed by Octave Maus (1856–1919).⁴⁷ The dramatist Maurice Maeterlinck (1862–1949), a champion of the Nordic myth, went even further, concluding that the French spirit, committed to a defense of the classical tradition, was impermeable to foreign influence and in no position to understand the originality of the English movement.⁴⁸ For Maus, Burne-Jones's return to past styles and subject matter was a sign of modernity, for it was less "the imitation of the style than an analogous way of thinking, feeling and seeing—the transporting of the modern artist to a chosen land, at a time when it was silently reliving the days of its forgotten past."⁴⁹ It should be noted, however, that Burne-Jones's reception was not

always so positive; like that of the French critics, Verhaeren's appreciation of Burne-Jones would suffer a certain reversal.⁵⁰

One of the decisive moments in Burne-Jones's relationship with Belgium came in 1888, when he was invited to participate in the exhibition of Les XX but had to decline owing to previous commitments.⁵¹ In 1890 photographic reproductions of his work, as well as that of Rossetti, were shown at the Galerie Dumont, Brussels. In 1895 he exhibited at the Cercle d'Art and at the Exposition des Beaux-Arts in Brussels, which showed two of his most famous works, *The Wheel of Fortune* (cat. no. 52) and *Love among the Ruins* (1894; National Trust, Wightwick Manor near Wolverhampton). He was represented again at the Exposition des Beaux-Arts in 1897. He was invited in 1896 to participate in the first Salon of Idealist Art, organized by Jean Delville to take a stand "against decadence, against the confusion of the so-called Realist, Impressionist or *libriste* schools, all of which are degenerate forms of art." But Burne-Jones turned the offer down, as he had Péladan, and his work, as well as that of Watts and Rossetti, was represented here too only by photographic reproductions.⁵² Among the more important publications in which the work of Burne-Jones was included was Georges-Olivier Destrées's *Les Préraphaélites: Notes sur l'art décoratif et la peinture en*



Figure 34. The White Room in Fernand Khnopff's house, Avenue des Courses, Brussels, 1900–1902, showing a reproduction of *The Wheel of Fortune*, 1875–83 (cat. no. 52)



Figure 35. Fernand Khnopff (1858–1921), *Avec Grégoire le Roy: Mon coeur pleure d'autrefois*, 1889. Pencil and chalk, 10 × 5¾ in. (25.5 × 14.5 cm). The Hearn Family Trust, New York



Figure 36. Edward Burne-Jones. Study for *The Mirror of Venus*, ca. 1873. Pencil, 10 × 7 in. (25.3 × 17.7 cm). Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge



Figure 37. Odilon Redon (1840–1916), *The Closed Eyes*, 1890. Pencil, 19½ × 14⅞ in. (49.5 × 37.2 cm). Musée du Louvre, Département des Arts Graphiques, on loan to the Musée d'Orsay, Paris

Angleterre, published in 1894, which presented portraits of five artists, including Burne-Jones, and a chronological catalogue of his works. The book's popularity was comparable to that in France of Gabriel Mourey's *Passé le détroit: La Vie et l'art à Londres* and Robert de la Sizeranne's *La Peinture anglaise contemporaine: 1844–1894*, both published in 1895.

But above and beyond the fashion for English art and literature that prevailed in Belgium and France at the time stands the singularly deep friendship of Burne-Jones and the Belgian painter Fernand Khnopff. An avowed Anglophile, Khnopff went so far as to give his works English titles and to include English references in his French titles. Invited to exhibit at the Hanover Gallery in London in 1890, Khnopff sent his painting *Memories* (fig. 39). But he went to London for the first time only in 1891. From then on he visited the city regularly, contributed to *The Studio* from 1894 until 1914, and wrote articles about English artists for Belgian magazines. In February 1899 he wrote a letter explaining the reasons for this passion to Paul Schultze-Naumburg, who was preparing a publication on his work: "That which *demand*s admiration in the work of a number of English artists is the precise expression of the sense of legend."⁵³

The mutual influence of Khnopff and Burne-Jones had already been noted by their contemporaries. In 1893, referring to the current Salon of the Rose + Croix, the painter Félicien Rops (1833–1898) wrote: "Knopff [*sic*] no longer imitates the French; he has sunk up to the chin in the boots of the

Englishman Burne-Jones."⁵⁴ The artists expressed their esteem for one another by exchanging gifts of their drawings. In 1894 Burne-Jones sent Khnopff a drawing from 1890 with a dedication (fig. 32), and in 1896 Khnopff sent Burne-Jones an autographed drawing (fig. 33). Khnopff's near veneration of the English painter was attested by the presence of a reproduction of *The Wheel of Fortune* in the White Room of his house in Brussels (fig. 34), and he also took up the pen several times in support of his English friend. The three principal texts are the *Conférence au cercle artistique sur Walter Crane* (1894)—which digressed from its purported subject and concluded with a veritable apologia of Burne-Jones—his appreciation of Burne-Jones, which appeared in the *Magazine of Art*, and his *Souvenirs à propos de Sir Edward Burne-Jones* (1915).⁵⁵ Throughout this impressive and persistent propaganda campaign, in which Khnopff reveals as much about himself as about Burne-Jones, it is clear that their mutual influence involved less the forms in their paintings than "modes of mental representation"; in his analysis of Burne-Jones's work, Khnopff recognized the correspondences in their work as those between men haunted by memory and by the shared silence of their inner worlds.

THE "INWARD GAZE" OF BURNE-JONES

The representation of withdrawal into the self, of the hidden, inner world, the world of dreams and sleep, recurs like a



Figure 38. Fernand Khnopff (1858–1921), *Marguerite Khnopff*, 1887. Oil on wood, $37\frac{3}{4} \times 29\frac{3}{8}$ in. (96 × 74.5 cm).
Musées Royaux des Beaux-Arts, Brussels

leitmotiv in the work of Burne-Jones. These themes and their corresponding imagery are the clearest evidence of the links between this artist and the universe of the Symbolists, particularly in Belgium and France. At the heart of many of Burne-Jones's representations is the theme of music (*The Lament*, *Chant d'Amour*, *The Golden Stairs*; cat. nos. 44, 84, 109), which often serves as the inspiration for this inner world. Music also played an important role in the thinking of Arthur Schopenhauer (1788–1860), a philosopher whose writings had a profound influence on the Symbolists. The supreme art, music in its immateriality reveals to the individual his deepest and

most absolute being and is a source of sensory and pictorial correspondences. Khnopff developed this notion in his analysis of *The Golden Stairs*, in which “a metallic glissando of brass cymbals evokes the sad golden and faded purple tones of autumnal sunsets.”⁵⁶ The best illustration of the affinity between Burne-Jones and Khnopff is the mirror, symbol of meditative reflection. In strikingly similar ways, the two artists created the image of woman absorbed in the narcissistic contemplation of her double—Khnopff's *Avec Grégoire le Roy: Mon coeur pleure d'autrefois* (fig. 35) and Burne-Jones's study for *The Mirror of Venus* (fig. 36), to cite only two examples.⁵⁷

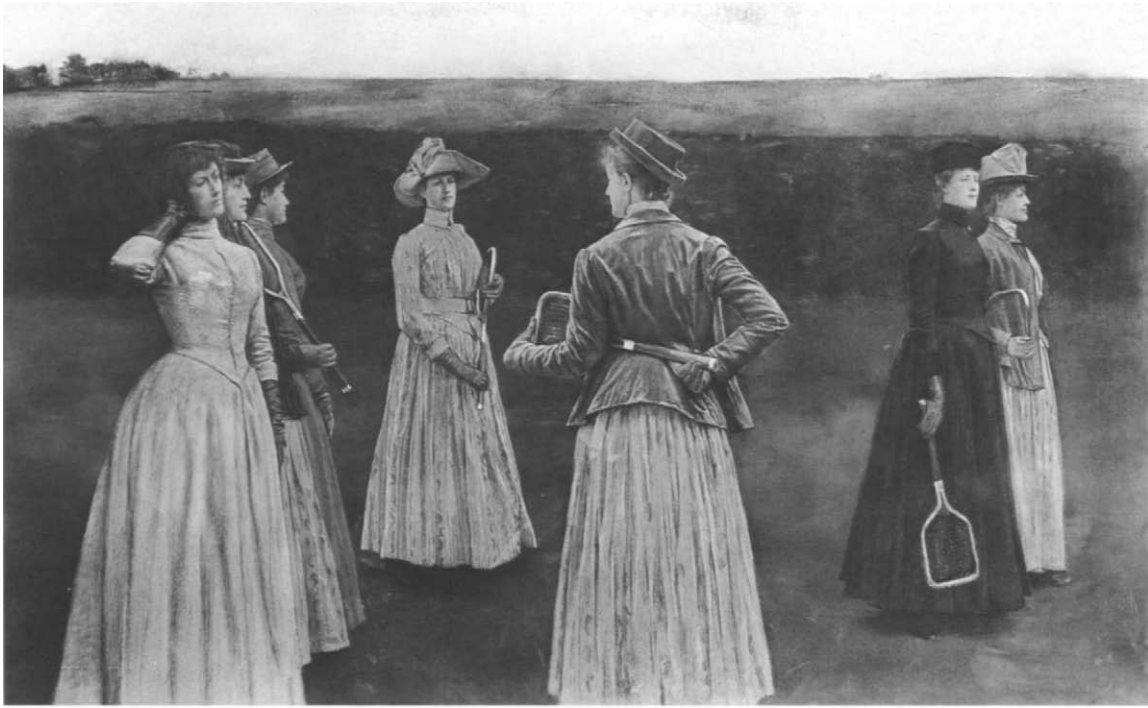


Figure 39. Fernand Khnopff (1858–1921), *Memories*, 1889. Pastel on paper mounted on canvas, 50 × 78¾ in. (127 × 200 cm). Musées Royaux des Beaux-Arts, Brussels



Figure 40. Pierre Puvis de Chavannes (1824–1898), *The Sacred Wood Dear to the Arts and Muses*, ca. 1884–89. Oil on canvas, 36½ × 91 in. (92.7 × 231 cm). The Art Institute of Chicago, Mr. and Mrs. Potter Palmer Collection

Burne-Jones also frequently represented the ultimate avatar of these psychological states—sleep. His primary artistic sources were such Michelangelesque figures as *The Dying Slave* (Musée du Louvre, Paris), which he repeated three times in *The Wheel of Fortune*. It is notable that Redon also refers to this figure in *The Closed Eyes* (fig. 37). Burne-Jones's preoccupation with the theme of sleep culminated in the *Briar Rose* (cat. nos. 55–58), which offers a strange and revelatory interpretation of the fairy tale, for while slumbering figures abound, the moment of the princess's awakening is never represented.⁵⁸ His very approach to the story was, in effect, a rejection of the

conventions of narrative, a claim to beauty alone, here expressed as hypnotic abandon.⁵⁹ He used a similar approach in his portrait of Lady Windsor (cat. no. 161), which probably owes much to Khnopff's portrait of his sister, Marguerite (fig. 38). But he went further in his simplification of the image than did Khnopff, who continued to adhere to the tradition of Flemish portraiture. Burne-Jones's likeness of Lady Windsor displays a marvelous decorative elegance and an ineffable psychological presence, the sitter refusing to return the viewer's gaze.

The timelessness suggested by these different interconnecting worlds and the eclipsing of the subject permitted the

elaboration of a fundamentally decorative aesthetic. In this connection *The Golden Stairs* anticipates Khnopff's *Memories* (fig. 39), which was in its turn prefigured by *The Wedding of Psyche* (cat. no. 41). In all three works the rhythmic repetition of nearly identical figures recalls the hieratic and eternal monumentality of Puvis de Chavannes (fig. 40). Puvis comes also to mind when we consider Burne-Jones's final venture into the Arthurian legend, *The Sleep of Arthur in Avalon* (fig. 107).

These few examples make it clear that a chronological and factual analysis alone of Burne-Jones's reception in France and Belgium contributes little to our understanding of the phenomenon. The intriguing richness and beauty of his work reside also in his intuitive dialogue with some of the most audacious ideas and works of his time.

1. Ernest Chesneau, *La Peinture anglaise* (Paris, 1882), pp. 171–72.
2. On the subject of Burne-Jones's critical reception in France, see Allemand-Cosneau 1992.
3. Chesneau, *La Peinture anglaise*, pp. 171–72.
4. See Jacques Lethève, "La Connaissance des peintres préraphaélites anglais en France (1855–1900)," *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, ser. 6, 53 (May–June 1959), pp. 315–28.
5. Raymond Bouyer, "Les Sympathies de l'art actuel," *L'Ermitage*, December 1895, p. 279.
6. Philippe Burty, "Exposition de la Royal Academy," *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, ser. 2, 12 (July 1869), pp. 53–55. The article included a reproduction of *Pan and Psyche* (see cat. no. 103). "The woods drawn for us by Mr. Burne-Jones and engraved by Mr. Swain derive from a composition that we saw in preparation in the artist's studio." This engraving was reproduced in Allemand-Cosneau 1992, p. 68.
7. See Christopher Newall, "Themes of Love and Death in Aesthetic Painting of the 1860s," in Tate Gallery 1997–98, pp. 36, 41.
8. See Barbara Bryant, "G. F. Watts at the Grosvenor Gallery," in Yale Center for British Art 1996, p. 120. The watercolor version, no: the oil painting, of *The Apparition* was shown in London. The owner at the time was Léon Gauchez, proprietor of the review *L'Art*, which gave its office address as the location of the work (information kindly provided by Geneviève Lacambre).
9. J. Comyns Carr, "La Saison d'art à Londres: La 'Grosvenor Gallery,'" *L'Art* 10 (1877), pp. 78, 79. Comyns Carr reviewed the exhibitions at the Grosvenor Gallery in 1879 and 1880 for *L'Art*, always giving special attention to Burne-Jones and commenting on *The Golden Stairs* in 1880.
10. Marcel Proust, *Jean Santeuil*, Pléiade ed. (Paris, 1971), p. 804.
11. This became one of the artist's most famous pictures. It was exhibited again at the Salon of the Société Nationale des Beaux-Arts. The work was accidentally damaged while being photographed for Boussod, Valadon & Cie. Burne-Jones immediately undertook a new version in oil. See *Memorials*, vol. 2, pp. 237–38.
12. Charles Blanc, *Les Beaux-Arts à l'Exposition Universelle de 1878* (Paris, 1878), p. 335.
13. Edmond Duranty, "Expositions de la Royal Academy et de la Grosvenor Gallery," *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, ser. 2, 20 (1879), p. 372.
14. "Edward Burne-Jones—W. B. Richmond," in Ernest Chesneau, *Artistes anglais contemporains* (Paris and London, 1882), p. 13; this text is illustrated with Lalauze's engraving of *The Beguiling of Merlin*.
15. Joris-Karl Huysmans, *À Rebours* (Paris, 1884). The English painter alluded to is Watts.
16. Archives of Robert de Montesquiou, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris, Département des Manuscrits (NAF 15335, f. 81), quoted by Edgar Munhall in *Whistler and Montesquiou: The Butterfly and the Bat* (New York: Frick Collection; Paris: Flammarion, 1995), French ed., p. 58.
17. Paris, private collection, mentioned by Munhall in *Whistler and Montesquiou*, p. 58.
18. Joy Newton, ed., *La Chauve-Souris et le Papillon: Correspondance Montesquiou-Whistler* (Glasgow, 1990), quoted in Munhall, *Whistler and Montesquiou*, p. 59.
19. Jean Lorrain, "Printemps mystique: Pour Burne-Jones," in *Griseries* (Paris, 1887), pp. 83–84.
20. Burne-Jones himself openly expressed doubts as to the aesthetic validity of Impressionism.
21. Édouard Rod, "Les Préraphaélites anglais," part 2, *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, ser. 2, 36 (November 1887), p. 416.
22. For the complete definition, see Jacques Lethève, "Les Salons of the Rose-Croix," *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, ser. 6, 56 (December 1960), pp. 363–74.
23. Antonin Proust, *Exposition Universelle de 1889* (Paris, 1889), p. 603.
24. Letter from Charles Ephrussi to Gustave Moreau, in Pierre-Louis Mathieu, ed., "Lettres de Gustave Moreau," *Archives de l'art français* 29 (1988), p. 131.
25. Fondation Custodia, Lugt Collection, Paris, Moreau, G.: 9308 a; see Mathieu, "Lettres de Gustave Moreau," p. 131.
26. Mathieu writes that in a letter to Henri Evenpoel of July 1894, Moreau was highly critical of Burne-Jones (*ibid.*).
27. Gustave Moreau is supposed to have exhibited his watercolors for La Fontaine's *Fables* at the Goupil Gallery in London in 1886. (Information kindly provided by Geneviève Lacambre.)
28. The letter is dated December 25, 1891; Fondation Custodia, Lugt Collection, Paris, Puvis de Chavannes, P.:9308 bb.
29. The cards are dated February 8, and April 28, 1892; Fondation Custodia, Lugt Collection, Paris, Puvis de Chavannes, P.:9308 bc.
30. Letter from Puvis de Chavannes to Burne-Jones, March 18, 1895: "Moreover, you have given me hopes for a meeting for which I have long wished" (Fondation Custodia, Lugt Collection, Paris, Puvis de Chavannes, P.:9308 bd).
31. Quoted in Fitzgerald 1975, p. 222.
32. For the complete official correspondence, see Musée du Louvre, Paris, Archives des Musées Nationaux, L8 and D8 Burne-Jones. A certified copy of Léonce Bénédict's letter (dated May 1893) has been preserved.
33. Letter from Burne-Jones to Watts, quoted in Harrison and Waters 1973, pp. 174–77.
34. Sâr Péladan, "Gustave Moreau," *L'Ermitage*, June 1895, pp. 33–34.
35. *Ibid.*
36. Burne-Jones worked in 1894–95 on Comyns Carr's production of *King Arthur*, which premiered at the Lyceum Theatre in London on January 12, 1895; see Poulson 1986. Fernand Khnopff designed similar costumes in 1903 for Ernest Chausson's *Roi Arthur* (Théâtre Royal de la Monnaie, Brussels). Burne-Jones also designed a costume for Mrs. Patrick Campbell, who played the female lead in Maeterlinck's *Pelléas et Mélisande* in 1898. This play premiered at the Prince of Wales Theatre on June 21, 1898, several days after Burne-Jones's death.
37. This matter is not mentioned in the *Memorials*.
38. Using the pseudonym Ossit, the Baronne wrote an enthusiastic text about Burne-Jones that was published in *Le Figaro*, May 7, 1893.
39. On Baronne Deslandes, see Hyppolite Buffenoire, *Les Salons de Paris; Grandes Dames contemporaines: La Baronne Deslandes* (Paris, 1895).
40. Robert de Montesquiou, "Le Spectre (Burne-Jones)," in *Autels privilégiés* (Paris, 1898), pp. 202, 211.
41. *Le Journal*, April 18, 1895; reprinted in Octave Mirbeau, *Des artistes*, Union Générale ed. (Paris, 1986), pp. 202–8. See also, "Botticelli protest!" *Le Journal*, October 4–11, 1896.
42. Paul Leprieux, "Correspondance d'Angleterre," *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, ser. 3, 10 (July 1893), p. 80.
43. Robert de la Sizeranne, "Rose + Croix, Pré-Raphaélites et esthètes: La Renaissance esthétique des deux côtés de la Manche," *Le Correspondant*, March 25, 1892, pp. 1138–39.
44. See *Paris-Bruxelles, Bruxelles-Paris* (exh. cat., Paris: Galeries Nationales du Grand Palais, 1997).
45. See *Paradis perdus: L'Europe symboliste* (exh. cat., Montreal: Musée des Beaux-Arts de Montréal, 1995).

46. "L'Essor," *La Nation*, March 17 and March 28, 1891; reprinted in *Émile Verhaeren: Écrits sur l'art (1881-1892)*, compiled and presented by Paul Aron (Brussels, 1997), p. 412.
47. Octave Maus, "Burne-Jones," *L'Art Moderne*, June 28, 1897, p. 205; quoted by Laurence Brogniez in "L'Exemple préraphaélite en Belgique: Barbares, Primitifs et . . . Modernes," in proceedings of the colloquium *France-Belgique, 1848-1914: Affinités—ambiguïtés* (Brussels, 1997), p. 196.
48. Laurence Brogniez, "Les Préraphaélites en Belgique: D'étranges rêveurs . . .," in *Splendeurs de l'idéal: Rops, Khnopff, Delville et leur temps* (exh. cat., Liège: Musée de l'Art Wallon, 1996), p. 125.
49. Maus, "Burne-Jones," p. 207; cited by Brogniez, "L'Exemple préraphaélite en Belgique," p. 127.
50. See, for example, Émile Verhaeren, "Le Salon du Champ de Mars," *L'Art Moderne*, May 9, 1895; reprinted in *Émile Verhaeren: Écrits sur l'art*, p. 667. Verhaeren went so far as to prefer the photographic reproduction of *Love among the Ruins* to the original.
51. Letter from Burne-Jones to Octave Maus, dated November 13, 1888, preserved in the Archives de l'Art Contemporain en Belgique, Musées Royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique, Brussels.
52. Brogniez, "L'Exemple préraphaélite en Belgique," p. 130.
53. Quoted in Robert L. Delevoy, Catherine De Croes, and Gisèle Ollinger-Zinque, *Fernand Khnopff, catalogue de l'oeuvre*, 2d ed. (Brussels, 1987), p. 27.
54. Félicien Rops, "Lettre à Armand Rassenfosse du 5 avril 1893," quoted in Busine 1992, p. 60.
55. For a study of Khnopff's texts on Burne-Jones, see Busine 1992.
56. Fernand Khnopff, "Des souvenirs à propos de Sir Edward Burne-Jones," *Annexes aux bulletins de la classe des Beaux-Arts (1915-1918)* (Brussels: Académie Royale de Belgique, 1919), pp. 35-42.
57. For a more detailed treatment of the formal analogies, see Benedetti 1981.
58. Petr Wittlich, "Les Yeux clos, le symbolisme, et les nouvelles formes du pathos," in *Paradis perdus*, p. 236.
59. See Ironside 1975, p. 178.

Birmingham and Oxford

Edward Jones, as he was known until some years into his professional career, when he annexed his last Christian name to make his surname more distinctive,¹ was born on August 28, 1833, at 11 Bennett's Hill, Birmingham (fig. 41). William IV was on the throne, but Queen Victoria, who was still reigning when he died, acceded only four years later. Birmingham was in the throes of the great industrial and economic expansion that followed the slump in its fortunes caused by the Napoleonic Wars, and Bennett's Hill was a newly constructed street in the commercial heart of the town. No. 33, which was built for his parents, has long since been demolished, but parts of the Neoclassical terrace to which it belonged still survive, tenanted by banks and insurance offices as they were during his boyhood. No pilgrim who visits Birmingham in search of Burne-Jones, especially if he or she is approaching the Art Gallery from New Street railway station, should fail to walk up Bennett's Hill.

The child's father, Edward Richard Jones, was a Londoner of Welsh descent who had moved north a few years earlier. One of many immigrants attracted by the prospect of work in the rapidly developing town, he was also drawn by love, marrying a local girl called Elizabeth Coley in 1830. The couple were blissfully happy, perhaps because they were very different in character. Edward Jones was dreamy, rather ineffectual, and easily moved by nature and poetry, while Elizabeth was a strong and lively personality. Recent research has shown that her father, Benjamin Coley, was the head of a family firm that made (as distinct from retailed) jewelry, a trade for which Birmingham had long been famous and which at the time supported about a tenth of the population.² He was evidently a successful businessman, living in the prosperous suburb of Edgbaston, and felt that his daughter had married beneath her. Nonetheless, he may well have put up money to build the Bennett's Hill house, with the idea of launching the young couple at a good address. Edward Jones opened a small carving, gilding, and frame-making business, no doubt hoping for trade from the local Society of Arts, for which Thomas Rickman had designed handsome new premises nearby in New Street in 1829. Birmingham had a flourishing artistic community. It supported two institutions of this kind, the

other being the easily confused Society of Artists in Temple Row; and it had produced at least one outstandingly talented painter in David Cox (1783–1859). No other Birmingham artist would achieve such eminence until the rise to fame of Burne-Jones himself.

Both sides of the family seem to have contributed to the child's mental constitution. From his father he inherited his Celtic melancholy and deep-seated romanticism, while the hard-headed Coleys gave him an almost ruthless determination

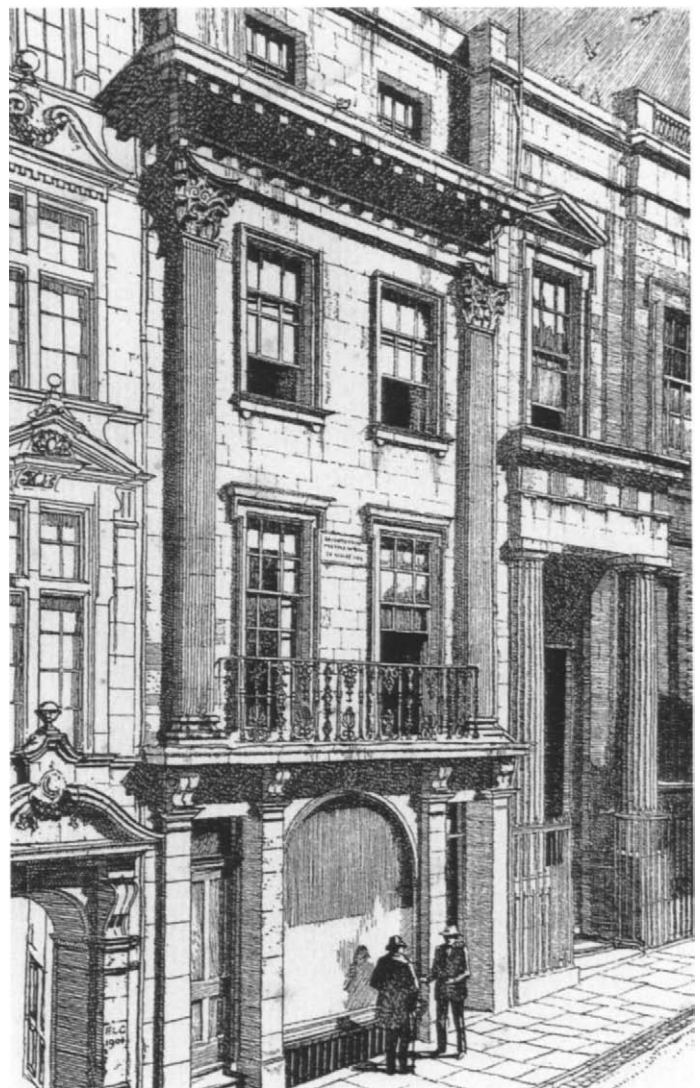


Figure 41. No. 11 Bennett's Hill, Birmingham. From a drawing by F. L. Griggs (1876–1938) in Georgiana Burne-Jones, *Memorials* (1904)

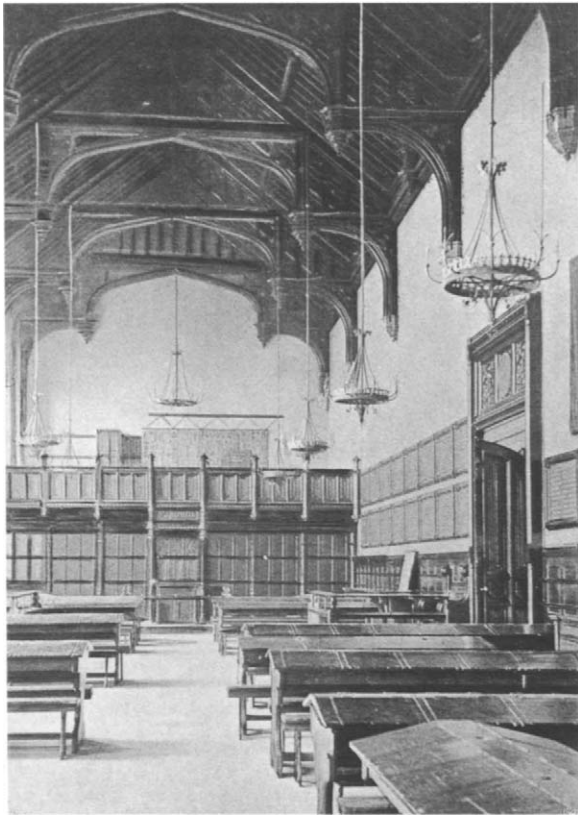


Figure 42. King Edward's School, Birmingham. From a photograph in A. C. Benson, *Life of Edward White Benson* (1900)



Figure 43. William Morris (1843–1896) at Oxford, aged twenty-three

and will to succeed which belied first appearances—his nervous disposition, delicate health, and puckish, whimsical humor. As Stanley Baldwin put it at the opening of the 1933 exhibition, he was “gentle, and some may have thought, yielding; but like iron and granite where the ideals he worked for were concerned.”³ The true romantic is a realist, and Burne-Jones was no exception to this seeming paradox. It is also tempting to see the Coleys’ creative involvement with jewelry as the source of his artistic talent—even a determining factor in his approach to painting. “I love to treat my pictures,” he once observed, “as a goldsmith does his jewels. I should like every inch of surface to be so fine that if all were buried or lost, all but a scrap from one of them, the man who found it might say: ‘Whatever this may have represented, it is a work of art, beautiful in surface and quality and colour.’”⁴ Whatever the boy’s maternal inheritance, one thing is clear: his father’s being a frame maker did not imply any feeling for art or craftsmanship on his side of the family. Indeed, Edward Jones showed a decided lack of aptitude for the trade he had adopted, and the business never flourished.

The Joneses had lost their first child, a girl, in infancy, and the birth of another was eagerly anticipated as a new beginning. It was therefore a particularly cruel stroke of fate that Elizabeth Jones herself died within a week of her son’s birth. In many ways the mainstay of the family, she left her husband a harassed and inconsolable widower, and her son (since Edward Jones seems to have been too devastated to contemplate remarriage) an only child.⁵ He was looked after by a housekeeper, a local girl called Ann Sampson who was possessively attached to him but could offer him no intellectual companionship, and the house soon lost whatever signs of taste it might have had in happier circumstances. “I recollect,” wrote Lady Burne-Jones, “how destitute [it] was of any visible thing that could appeal to imagination; chairs, carpets, tables and table furniture each duller and more commonplace than the other.”⁶ Nor were the wider horizons more enticing. The family’s religious life was grimly Sabbatarian, and no one could fail to be aware of the horrifying social conditions that obtained in large parts of the town as it ruthlessly pursued its destiny to become the rich, brash, teeming capital of the Midlands.

But we should not overdramatize the picture. Bennett’s Hill was respectable enough, and in 1851 the family moved to the suburbs. The boy also had friends and relations in the country to whom he could escape. Above all, his very isolation gave him a unique opportunity to develop that perennial resource of the deprived or lonely child, a vigorous imagination. From an early age he was a voracious reader of history, travelers’ tales, Scott, Byron, and other Romantic authors. In the rather gushing but nonetheless accurate words

of his widow, "Books, books, and always books were the gates of the new world into which he was entering."⁷

Here were the beginnings of the intensely literary turn of mind that was to prove such a stumbling block for twentieth-century critics; and it was developed dramatically when he entered the local grammar school, King Edward's (fig. 42), in 1844. Like the Society of Arts, the school was situated in New Street. It was also another symbol of Birmingham's aggrandizement, having recently been rebuilt in the Gothic Revival style to designs by Charles Barry and A. W. N. Pugin which anticipate their new Houses of Parliament by several years. Destined at this stage for business or engineering, Burne-Jones was placed on the "commercial" side, which trained boys for such careers; but by 1849 he had risen to be head of this department, and his father, persuaded by his schoolmaster, allowed him to transfer to the "classical" side with a view to going to university. By nature precocious, he had encountered the school at a particularly exciting time, when the headmaster, James Prince Lee, a brilliant classical scholar who had taught under Thomas Arnold at Rugby, was setting the highest academic standards. In fact, Burne-Jones had little personal contact with Lee, who left Birmingham in 1847 to become Bishop of Manchester, but he was undoubtedly stimulated by the feats of scholarship performed by Lee's closest pupils, among whom were E. W. Benson, a future Archbishop of Canterbury, and other luminaries of the Victorian Church.

Although literary and intellectual interests dominated Burne-Jones's mind at this formative period, with profound and far-reaching consequences, it should not be thought that he had no artistic leanings. On the contrary, we are told that he was "always drawing" as a child, and could "cover a sheet of foolscap" with figures "almost as quickly as one could have written."⁸ Already these drawings were consistently imaginative, with a strong element of fantasy. He had a great reputation among his schoolfellows for comic drawings of devils, but other subjects were more serious. We hear of scenes from Roman history, an illustration to Gottfried Bürger's famous ballad *Lenore* (1773), and evocations of such stirring events of the day as the massacre in the Khyber Pass and the exploits of Lady Sale, the heroine of the First Afghan War. Two illustrations to Alessandro Manzoni's novel *I promessi sposi* (1825–27) actually survive.⁹ The drawings were strongly influenced by such currently popular illustrators as George Cruikshank and E. H. Corbould.

He also had a certain knowledge of modern painting. Much gossip on the subject went on between his father and a Mr. Caswell, a retired businessman with pretensions to connoisseurship. Their talk seems to have been inspired by the annual exhibitions organized by the Society of Artists, which included the works of many contemporary masters. These

were often lent by local collectors such as Joseph Gillott, the steel-pen manufacturer who patronized J. M. W. Turner, William Etty, W. J. Müller, John Linnell, and others. By 1852 the exhibitions even included works by the Pre-Raphaelites, Millais's *Ophelia* and Walter Deverell's *Twelfth Night* both appearing that year. It was Mr. Caswell who first noticed Burne-Jones's attempts to draw, gave him encouragement, and predicted that one day he would be "a great historical painter."¹⁰ He also introduced him to relations by marriage, Mr. and Mrs. Charles Spozzi, who lived at Hereford and had known David Cox when the artist had settled there in the 1820s. Burne-Jones stayed with them on numerous occasions, and must have seen the Cox drawings on their walls.

The boy even had a little formal artistic training, both at King Edward's and at the Birmingham branch of the Government School of Design (situated in the Society of Arts building), where he attended evening classes during his years in the commercial department. In both cases he was taught by Thomas Clark, a landscape painter who had traveled widely in search of subjects and exhibited regularly at the Royal Academy. Unfortunately he was also a disastrous teacher, so much so that he had to resign from the School of Design in 1851. A more fruitful contact with a practicing artist awaited Burne-Jones in London when he stayed with an aunt, Mrs. Catherwood, in Camberwell. On one occasion in the early 1850s he met her brother-in-law, Frederick Catherwood, a former pupil of Sir John Soane and an acquaintance of Keats, who had made his name as an explorer and topographical draftsman, risking his life to penetrate the Mosque of Omar in Jerusalem and publishing pioneering books on the monuments of Mayan civilization buried deep in the Central American jungle. Burne-Jones was fascinated by Catherwood's drawings and firsthand accounts of places that had long haunted his imagination. But none of these experiences had the power at this stage to crystallize his own artistic aspirations. Even the presence of Pre-Raphaelite paintings in Birmingham seems to have made no impression on him—if indeed he was aware of it at all.¹¹

By the time he left school Burne-Jones was determined to be ordained, and was a committed adherent of the Tractarian, or Oxford, movement. This great attempt to evangelize the Anglican Church by reviving its Catholic doctrine and practice had been initiated in 1833, the year of his birth, by three outstanding churchmen, John Keble (1792–1866), John Henry Newman (1801–1890), and Edward Bouverie Pusey (1800–1882), all of whom held Oxford fellowships. Its appeal to the past and its emphasis on ritual, church furnishing, and everything summed up by the phrase "the beauty of holiness" captured the hearts and minds of many young men and women whose idealism and sense of poetry had been awakened by the

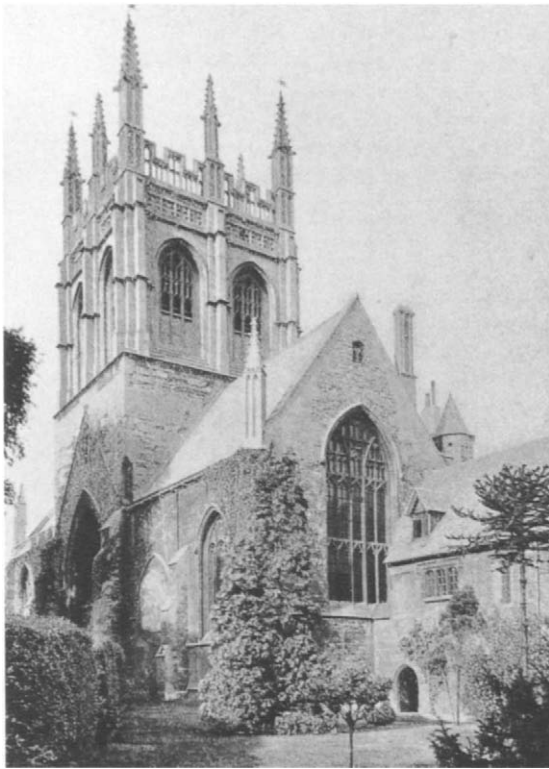
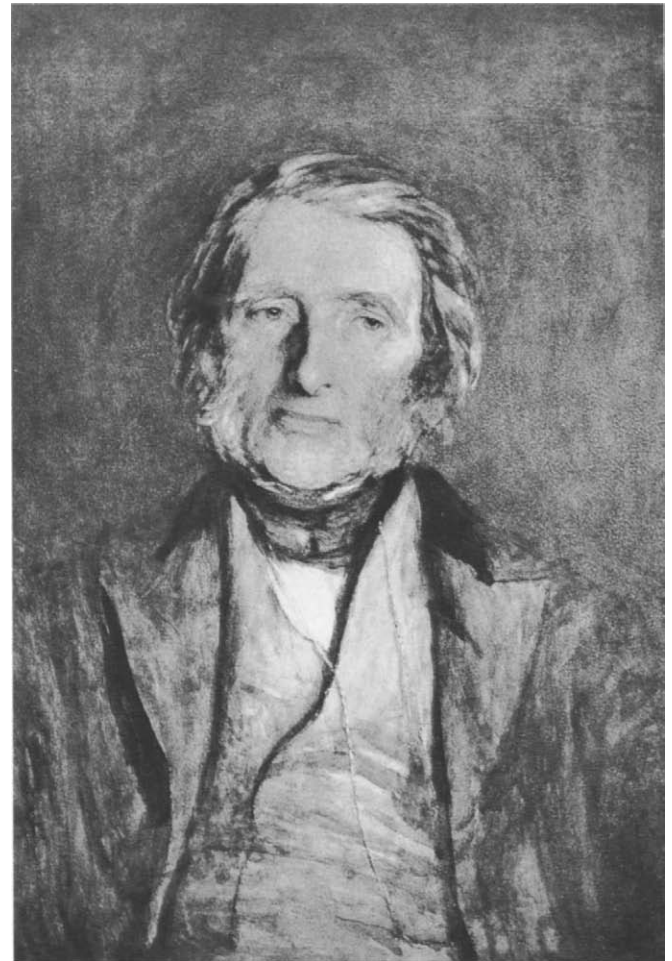


Figure 44. Merton College Chapel, Oxford. From a photograph in B. W. Henderson, *Merton College* (1899)

Figure 45. Hubert von Herkomer (1849–1914), *John Ruskin*, 1879. Watercolor, 29 x 19 in. (73.7 x 48.3 cm). National Portrait Gallery, London



Romantic movement. Burne-Jones was no exception. He was, as he later told the novelist Mrs. Humphry Ward, “rebellious” against the narrow puritanism from which he had suffered as a child, as well, no doubt, as reacting against the ugliness of his home surroundings.¹² More positively, he was responding to a variety of stimuli: his reading of Sir Walter Scott, whom Newman himself recognized as a powerful influence in creating an intellectual and spiritual climate favorable to Tractarian values; his knowledge of the choral music and the still unrestored fabric of Hereford Cathedral, which he encountered when staying with the Spozzis; the friendship of a young Tractarian priest attached to the cathedral, the Reverend John Goss; and a visit to Mount Saint Bernard’s Abbey, not far from Birmingham in Charnwood Forest, which had been built by Pugin in 1841 to house a community of Trappist monks under the patronage of the Roman Catholic layman Ambrose Phillips. Newman was his special hero, and Burne-Jones must have known that since 1849, four years after he had rocked the movement to its foundations by seceding to Rome, he had been based at the Birmingham Oratory. He was certainly familiar with Newman’s books, which had been introduced to him by Goss. He may even have attended his mesmerizing sermons.

In January 1853 Burne-Jones went up to Exeter College, Oxford. His early life may have had its hardships and deprivations, but from now on he was to enjoy some extraordinary strokes of luck for which he can only be envied. The first of these was to meet William Morris (1834–1896; fig. 43), a fellow freshman at the same college, and in him discover the perfect friend at the perfect moment, someone totally committed to the same ideals who would give him a lifetime of intellectual and moral support. Their backgrounds were very different, Morris coming from a large and well-to-do family living on the edge of Epping Forest. Both, however, were born romantics with a passion for the Middle Ages, strongly drawn to Tractarianism, and destined for the Church; and within a fortnight they were inseparable. They had little use for Exeter men, but they found congenial companions among a group of Burne-Jones’s school friends who had gone on to Pembroke College, where Dr. Francis Jeune, Lee’s predecessor at King Edward’s, was master. This set were all keen students of modern literature; their great hero was Tennyson.

Burne-Jones and Morris had expected Oxford to fulfill their fondest dreams, and it did so far as outward appearances went, being still an almost untouched medieval town. They would spend long afternoons in such “shrines” as Merton

College Chapel (fig. 44) or New College cloisters, and Burne-Jones, returning from his “terminal pilgrimage to Godstowe ruins and the burial place of Fair Rosamund,” saw so intense a vision of the Middle Ages as he walked beside the river that he had to “throw stones into the water to break the dream.”¹³ But Oxford was on the brink of change. The railway had already arrived, and the Oxford Act of 1854 would soon begin the overdue process of modernizing the university, sweeping away old statutes, depriving the clergy of their monopoly on fellowships, and in general implementing an ever-growing secularization. Nor was Oxford any longer throbbing with Tractarian excitement. It was now eight years since Newman’s secession, and the inevitable reaction had set in. Some colleges were experiencing a lively liberal revival; elsewhere, as Matthew Arnold observed in 1854, apathy prevailed. To many, like Mark Pattison, the future Rector of Lincoln College who had lived through the turmoil of the Tractarian heyday, the change was a welcome return to sanity, but Morris and Burne-Jones, viewing matters from a different perspective, were bitterly disappointed. During their first year they were still engrossed in religious affairs, and spent much time planning a conventual order or brotherhood with their friends. Such schemes were not uncommon in the wake of the Oxford movement, Newman’s community at Littlemore being the most famous. But by 1854 Burne-Jones was suffering one of those agonizing spiritual crises which the clash of religious and liberal ideologies made so typical of the time. An interview with Charles Marriott, Newman’s saintly successor at Saint Mary’s, brought little comfort. He seriously considered converting to Rome, and even tried for a commission in the Crimea, with wild thoughts of death on the battlefield. Fortunately this drastic solution was averted when he was turned down on grounds of health.

Burne-Jones’s religious convictions were no doubt sincere enough, but ultimately he had embraced Tractarianism for secondary reasons. It is therefore not surprising that it proved unequal to his needs or that, as its influence waned, he was prepared to consider some startlingly different alternatives. As early as 1853 he was voicing admiration for Charles Kingsley (1819–1875) and the Christian Socialists, although he must have known that Kingsley was among the Puseyites’ sternest critics. More radically, he was reading Thomas Carlyle (1795–1881), whose “life-philosophy” sprang from disillusion with all conventional Christianity. Carlyle was to exercise a profound influence on the Oxford circle, showing them that the moral imperatives of religion could be retained without the theological trappings. They embraced his assertion that honest, responsible work was the only true agent of social regeneration, and they identified closely with his concept of the “hero,” the prophet or man of vision who interprets for

ordinary mortals the transcendental will. For Carlyle saw literature as the form of prophecy most relevant to the modern world. In so doing he not only ensured his own ascendancy, casting himself in the role of “Hero as Man of Letters,” but pointed to conclusions that no young man burning with moral enthusiasm and disenchanted with the Church could escape.

The impact of Carlyle is vividly reflected in the *Oxford and Cambridge Magazine*, the short-lived journal that the Oxford set and their friends at the sister university produced in 1856. But it was John Ruskin (1819–1900; fig. 45), Carlyle’s self-confessed disciple, who gave the argument the further twist that made it of real significance for Morris and Burne-Jones, associating poetry with painting and claiming that the artist too had a prophetic role to play, since the imagination could convey, through the medium of allegory and symbolism, profound insights into the nature of God. There is evidence to suggest that Burne-Jones had encountered Ruskin’s works at school, but he began reading them in earnest only in 1853, under the influence of Morris. Ruskin too now acquired “hero” status, becoming, as it were, the “Hero as Critic.” “In aesthetics he is authority,” Burne-Jones wrote; and again, “His style is more wonderful than ever; the most persuasive oratory we ever read.”¹⁴ Nothing was more “persuasive” than the doctrine of prophetic imagination as it was defined in *The Stones of Venice* (1851–53) and the second volume of *Modern Painters* (1846). For here was precisely the clue he was seeking as the clerical ideal faded—nothing less than the assurance that by indulging his love of drawing imaginative subjects he was doing something that was socially valuable and even retained a measure of priestly significance. It was long before he outgrew the habit of referring to his prospects as an artist in quasi-religious terms. “Up till now,” he wrote in 1856, “I seem not to have done anybody any good, but when I work hard and paint visions and dreams and symbols for the understanding of people, I shall hold my head up better.”¹⁵ Indeed, behind the facade of jokes and banter he would always approach his work with an intense seriousness which stemmed from Ruskin and Carlyle, even if it came to assume a form, an unshakable belief in the moral efficacy of beauty, that Carlyle at least would have repudiated with Calvinistic scorn. Carlyle’s stern work ethic is also reflected in the relentless application—the “savage passion for work” for which he used to “thank the Lord in heaven”¹⁶—that made his career so astonishingly productive.

Of course in Ruskin’s book it was not enough simply to use imagination. Many artists did this, and he would never have called them prophets. To qualify for this elevated title they had to exercise the faculty properly, as Giotto, Tintoretto, Turner, the Pre-Raphaelites, and all his other heroes had exercised it,



Figure 46. William Holman Hunt (1827–1910), *The Light of the World*, 1851–53. Oil on canvas, $49\frac{3}{8} \times 23\frac{1}{2}$ in. (125.5 x 59.8 cm). By permission of the Warden and Fellows of Keble College, Oxford



Figure 47. John Everett Millais (1829–1896), *The Return of the Dove to the Ark*, 1851. Oil on canvas, $34\frac{1}{2} \times 21\frac{1}{2}$ in. (87.6 x 54.6 cm). Ashmolean Museum, Oxford



Figure 48. Charles Allston Collins (1828–1873), *Convent Thoughts*, 1850–51. Oil on canvas, $32\frac{1}{2} \times 22\frac{3}{4}$ in. (82.6 x 57.8 cm). Ashmolean Museum, Oxford

by basing it on a profound understanding of objective reality. As he put it in a much-quoted passage at the end of the first volume of *Modern Painters*, artists “should go to Nature in all singleness of heart, . . . rejecting nothing, selecting nothing, and scorning nothing; believing all things to be right and good, and rejoicing always in the truth. Then, when their memories are stored, and their imaginations fed, and their hands firm, let them take up the scarlet and the gold, give the reins to their fancy, and show us what their heads are made of.”¹⁷ Taking this exhortation to heart, Burne-Jones began to make studies of landscape and flowers in the Oxford countryside. Nor did he neglect his imaginative compositions. In March 1854 he was illustrating Tennyson’s “Lady of Shalott” (1832), and about the same time he began work on an ambitious set of designs for a collection of metrical fairy tales by Archibald Maclaren, a versatile character who ran a gymnasium in Oxford which he and Morris frequented. This is his earliest substantial work to survive (cat. nos. 1–3).

Meanwhile, the friends were discovering the Pre-Raphaelite pictures that Ruskin had extolled in *Modern Painters* and the *Edinburgh Lectures* (1854). At the Royal Academy in 1854 they were thrilled to find Holman Hunt’s *Light of the World* (fig. 46), and the following summer they visited its owner, Thomas Combe, the director of the Clarendon Press in Oxford. One of the Brotherhood’s staunchest early

patrons, Combe was a fervent Anglo-Catholic and had brought out a Tractarian tendency in the movement. This was reflected in some of his most important pictures, such as Hunt’s *Christian Missionary* (1849–50; Ashmolean Museum, Oxford), Millais’s *Return of the Dove to the Ark* (fig. 47), and Charles Allston Collins’s ultra-Anglo-Catholic *Convent*



Figure 49. Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828–1882), *The First Anniversary of the Death of Beatrice*, 1853–54. Watercolor, $16\frac{1}{2} \times 24$ in. (42 x 61 cm). Ashmolean Museum, Oxford

Thoughts (fig. 48). But the picture that impressed the friends most was a watercolor by Dante Gabriel Rossetti that had only recently entered the collection, *The First Anniversary of the Death of Beatrice* (fig. 49). This, Burne-Jones later recalled, was “our greatest wonder and delight, . . . and at once he seemed to us the chief figure in the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood.”¹⁸ The picture’s intensely poetic evocation of the Middle Ages corresponded exactly to their own ardent romanticism, and they were captivated by the artistic personality behind it.

1. It was not until as late as 1886 that he was listed as “Burne-Jones” in the index of the Grosvenor Gallery catalogues (appearing as “Jones, E. Burne” before this); and the double-barreled surname was made official only when he accepted a baronetcy in 1894 (*Memorials*, vol. 2, pp. 241–42).

2. I am grateful to Shirley Bury for drawing my attention to this interesting fact.

3. Stanley Baldwin, *This Torch of Freedom* (London, 1935), p. 176.

4. De Lisle 1904, pp. 170–71. It is curious that Lady Burne-Jones makes no mention of the Coleys’ jewelry business in her biography; indeed she goes out of her way to stress that “there was no foreshadowing of the gifts of this child in the family of either parent” (*Memorials*, vol. 1, p. 3). Perhaps this pointed disregard had its origin in some rift between Benjamin Coley and his son-in-law, two men of very different character.

5. Edward Richard Jones did, however, marry his housekeeper in old age (*Memorials*, vol. 2, p. 125).

6. *Ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 155. The writer was actually describing not the Bennett’s Hill house but 1 Poplar Place, a suburban house to which the Joneses moved in 1851.

7. *Ibid.*, p. 18.

8. *Ibid.*, pp. 8, 38.

9. Arts Council 1975–76, no. 1, with one illus.

10. Lago 1981, p. 133.

11. A more detailed account of Burne-Jones’s earliest artistic experiences will be found in Christian 1985.

12. Lago 1981, p. 28.

13. *Memorials*, vol. 1, p. 97.

14. *Ibid.*, pp. 79, 85.

15. *Ibid.*, p. 143.

16. *Ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 6.

17. Ruskin, *Works*, vol. 3 (1903), p. 624.

18. *Memorials*, vol. 1, p. 110.

Pre-Raphaelite Apprenticeship

Events now gathered momentum. During the long (summer) vacation of 1855 the friends toured northern France. Ruskin directed their steps, whether they were visiting the great cathedrals or enjoying a rapturous confrontation with Fra Angelico's *Coronation of the Virgin* (ca. 1430) in the Louvre. For some time now they had known that the clerical life was not for them, and in May they had jettisoned the idea of forming a conventual order. Now, walking one night on the quayside at Le Havre, they finally decided to devote themselves to art, Burne-Jones as a painter, Morris as an architect. "That," Burne-Jones later recalled, "was the most memorable night of my life."¹

Morris returned to Birmingham to stay with Burne-Jones, and there another excitement followed, the discovery in

Cornish's bookshop of Southey's reprint of Sir Thomas Malory's *Morte d'Arthur* (1485). This book, even more than the works of Chaucer, which they had been reading at Oxford, defined their early medievalism. In Burne-Jones's case it was to remain the overriding literary inspiration, and he identified totally with its mysticism and romance. As he himself wrote, it was something that could "never go out of the heart," and he came to see its spiritual climax, the quest for the Holy Grail, as "an explanation of life."²

The Michaelmas (fall) term was, not surprisingly, unsettled as he pondered how to put his resolve into practice, but in January 1856 he contrived to meet Rossetti (fig. 50) in London. His path was smoothed since Rossetti had already read a gratifying reference to his work that Burne-Jones had inserted into a review of Thackeray's novel *The Newcomes* (1853–55) which he had written for the *Oxford and Cambridge Magazine*. The great man invited him to visit his studio, romantically overlooking the Thames in Chatham Place, Blackfriars, and in May, having given up all thought of taking a degree, Burne-Jones settled in London to begin his career as an artist under his hero's supervision. The previous January Morris had articulated himself to the leading Gothic Revival architect, George Edmund Street (1824–1881). Street's practice was then in Oxford, but he moved his office to London in August 1856.

Rossetti gave his disciple some informal lessons, and for about three years Burne-Jones attended evening life classes at the art school run by James Matthews Leigh (1808–1860), a former pupil of Etty, in Newman Street, Bloomsbury. This, apart from his early spell at the Birmingham School of Design, was the only formal artistic training he received. Having learned "nothing at all" at Leigh's, he wrote, "I went home and made a school of practice for myself out of the studies for my designs."³ Sickert, for one, approved. In an article entitled "The Teaching of Art and Development of the Artist," published in 1912, he held Burne-Jones up as an "admirable example" (Turner and Charles Keene were others) of an artist who had learned his trade "on the job" rather than wasting years "in a vacuum . . . of abstract study."⁴ Perhaps so powerful a personality would always have escaped the undue professionalism from which many Victorian artists suffered,

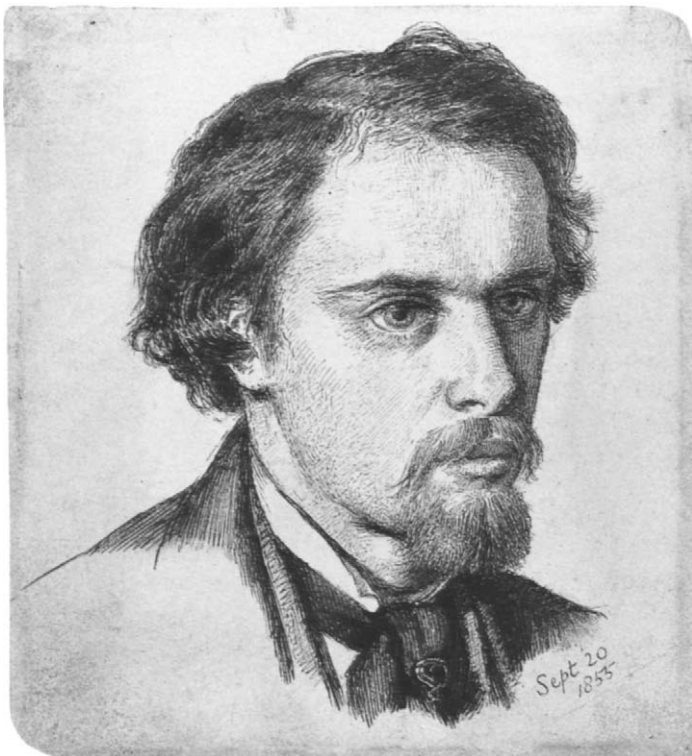


Figure 50. Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828–1882), *Self-Portrait*, 1855. Pen and ink, $4\frac{7}{8} \times 4\frac{1}{4}$ in. (12.4 x 10.8 cm). Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge

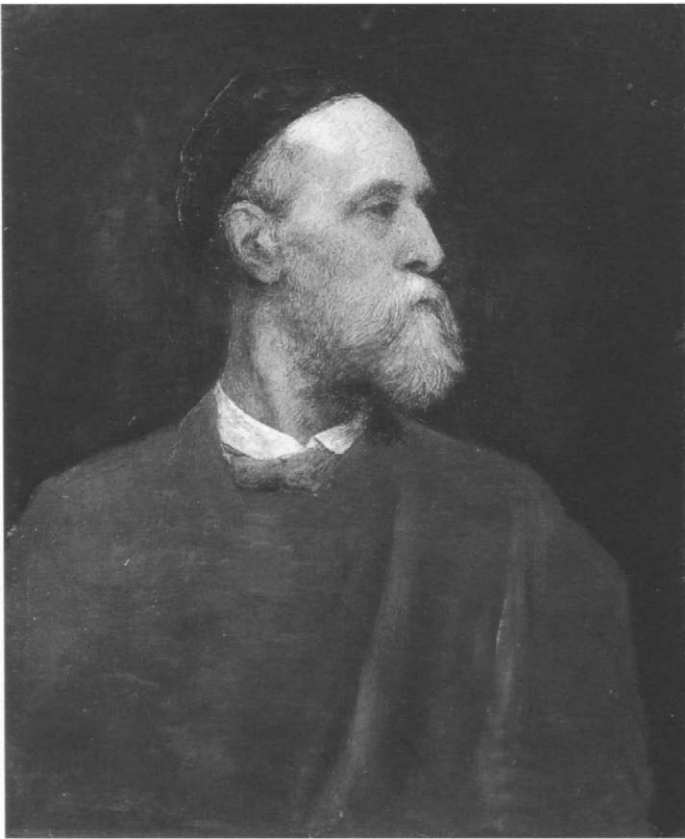


Figure 51. George Frederic Watts (1817–1904), *Self-Portrait*, ca. 1879. Oil on canvas, 25 x 20 in. (63.5 x 50.8 cm). National Portrait Gallery, London

but Burne-Jones's lack of training can only have helped him to retain the freshness of vision and unconventional approach to technique which are essential aspects of his creativity. There is a sense in which he was always an amateur, and all the better for it.

From being awed outsiders, Morris and Burne-Jones were suddenly at the heart of the Pre-Raphaelite circle. In January 1856 Burne-Jones began to correspond with Ruskin ("I'm not E. C. B. Jones now, . . . my future title is 'the man who wrote to Ruskin and got an answer by return'"),⁵ and the friends finally met him the following November, paying an ecstatic visit to Denmark Hill when Ruskin returned after several months abroad. They also met Ford Madox Brown, the father figure of the movement with whom they were soon on intimate terms, as well as Millais, Hunt, Arthur Hughes (1832–1915), and everyone else in this closely knit but rapidly expanding community. Founded in 1848, the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood had now passed through its earliest and most revolutionary stage, when its pictures had caused shock and outrage. Largely because of Ruskin's advocacy, it had won many adherents, and by the mid-1850s the walls of the Royal Academy, the very institution that the Brothers had set out to subvert, were peppered with pictures showing the movement's influence. To this extent Burne-Jones and Morris, who had abandoned Street's office by the end of 1856 and was now, at

Rossetti's insistence, struggling to become a painter as well, were part of a much wider phenomenon. Burne-Jones also found himself absorbed into the orbit of George Frederic Watts (1817–1904; fig. 51), the genius-in-residence at Little Holland House in Kensington, where the indefatigable Sara Prinsep, wife of a wealthy Anglo-Indian civil servant and sister of the equally formidable Julia Margaret Cameron, the famous photographer, presided over a salon packed with celebrities from the worlds of art, literature, politics, and science. Ruskin, Rossetti, and other Pre-Raphaelites were among Mrs. Prinsep's "lions."

Within this galaxy of interlocking circles, Rossetti, Morris, and Burne-Jones formed a closely knit bohemian clique passionately devoted to a cult of the Middle Ages. A man of immense charisma and magnetism, Rossetti had been the driving force behind the original PRB, and he was now to launch a second wave of the movement with the assistance of his two acolytes. Conditioned by Carlyle to look for heroes, the friends had already found a whole series—Charles Kingsley, Tennyson, Ruskin, and Carlyle himself. None had quite answered to their innermost needs, but Rossetti unquestionably did so in both artistic and personal terms. Their encounter with him was the perfect climax to their early aspirations, and once again, as with their discovery of each other, one can only marvel at their luck. For Burne-Jones in particular Rossetti would be a vital source of inspiration for everything that followed. To the end of his life he would ask himself whether Rossetti would "approve" of his work "and be pleased with it, or whether he'd say it was rubbish."⁶ In retrospect 1856, the "annus mirabilis" of his wife's biography, seemed "a year in which . . . it never rained nor clouded, but was blue summer from Christmas to Christmas," when "London streets glittered, and . . . the air [was] sweet and full of bells."⁷

But it must not be thought that this was a one-way relationship, Rossetti being in every sense the giver, Burne-Jones and Morris the passive receivers. On the contrary, the power and energy released by their union were the result of a pooling of resources. Burne-Jones and Morris, who were, after all, only five and six years younger than their master, brought to the encounter minds that were richly endowed and perhaps, given their superior formal education, more disciplined. Already ardent and knowledgeable devotees of everything medieval by the time they left Oxford, they as much as Rossetti were responsible for the intense medievalism which characterizes the work of their circle in the late 1850s. Hitherto, Rossetti's imagination had been dominated by Dante. Suddenly he switched his allegiance to Malory, declaring that the *Morte d'Arthur* and the Bible were "the two greatest books in the world,"⁸ and there is little doubt that he was introduced to, or at least made more aware of Malory's book

by his disciples. Similarly, with their knowledge of illuminated manuscripts in the Bodleian Library, they seem to have encouraged Rossetti's tendency to base his watercolor style on medieval miniatures.⁹ In human terms, too, Rossetti benefited. If he provided the friends with the ideal hero, they gave him what he needed almost as urgently: admiration, intellectual companionship, scope for his formidable powers of leadership, and a welcome relief from the nagging anxiety of his long and tangled relationship with Elizabeth (Lizzie) Siddal (1834–1862).

Burne-Jones would later refuse to allow anything into the canon of his work prior to 1856. The chief casualties of this rule were the remarkable designs for Maclaren's *Fairy Family* (cat. nos. 1–3). Rediscovered and published only in recent years, they are a fascinating record of his development during this crucial period, the majority being done before he met Rossetti but a few clearly showing that artist's influence. The first work Burne-Jones would acknowledge was *The Waxen Image*, a pen-and-ink drawing of 1856 on the theme of witchcraft, based on Rossetti's poem "Sister Helen." Unfortunately, though we have a detailed description, the drawing itself was destroyed in the Second World War and no photograph seems to survive. Equally elusive in its way is his contribution to the murals illustrating Malory that Rossetti and a team of assistants—including Morris, Hughes, and two pupils of Watts, Val Prinsep (1838–1904) and J. R. Spencer Stanhope (1829–1908)—painted on the walls of the newly built Oxford Union Society in 1857 (fig. 52). The episode is one of the most famous in Pre-Raphaelite annals, partly because the work was carried out in exuberant high spirits, all the more frenzied for the presence of Algernon Charles Swinburne (1837–1909; fig. 78), who, as an undergraduate at Balliol, joined the circle at this date. It was also, incidentally, the moment when Burne-Jones, taking advantage of his relative isolation, grew a beard, an ornament he retained, at one length or another, for life. But the paintings themselves, executed in the most amateur fashion with only the minimum of preparation, soon faded to mere shadows. Modern lighting has given them a little more substance, but they remain essentially wrecks.

A more tangible expression of Burne-Jones's intentions is provided by a group of small pen-and-ink drawings dating from 1857–61, a continuation of the series started by *The Waxen Image* and all, as the American educator and author Charles Eliot Norton (1827–1908) said of that drawing, "in the extreme Pre-Raphaelite manner, exquisitely over-elaborated [and] of infinite detail."¹⁰ Early in his career Rossetti had experienced great difficulty with painting in oils, and throughout the 1850s he preferred to work in pen and ink or watercolor. Burne-Jones's addiction to pen and ink was an extension of this trend, although his drawings also owe much,

both technically and iconographically, to the engravings by Dürer and other early German masters which were popular in his circle at this time. We know that in 1856 his rooms were "hung with brasses of old knights and drawings [*sic*] of Albert Dürer."¹¹ These probably belonged to Morris, although Ruskin also was an important source; he was a keen collector of Dürer's prints, which he used extensively in his work as a teacher of drawing. Another enthusiast was the painter William Bell Scott (1811–1890), and in fact it was to him, in February 1857, that Rossetti described Burne-Jones's drawings as "marvels of finish and imaginative detail, unequalled by anything unless perhaps Albert Dürer's finest works."¹²

First comes a group of medieval subjects which bear close comparison both with the watercolors that Rossetti was currently painting with what he called "chivalric Froissartian themes"¹³ and with Morris's first volume of poetry, *The Defence of Guenevere*, published in March 1858 (cat. nos. 5, 6). The triangular relationship is emphasized by the fact that Morris, who at this stage had considerable private means, owned or commissioned most of Rossetti's "Froissartian" watercolors and one of Burne-Jones's best drawings in the same idiom, *The Knight's Farewell* (cat. no. 5). The next drawings are more varied. They include a beautiful rendering of the parable of the ten virgins (cat. no. 8) but also that extraordinary performance *Buondelmonte's Wedding* (cat. no. 7), an account of a famous incident in Italian history in which the artist takes quaintness, intensity, and horror vacui to the brink of nightmare. The series ends with a drawing inspired by Robert Browning's well-known poem "Childe Roland" (1855; cat. no. 14). Browning was enormously admired in Pre-Raphaelite circles at this date, and Burne-Jones had met him by July 1856.

Although Burne-Jones liked to tell doleful tales of his early life in London (disgusting meals in cheap restaurants; a friend of his mother who lectured him on extravagance when he

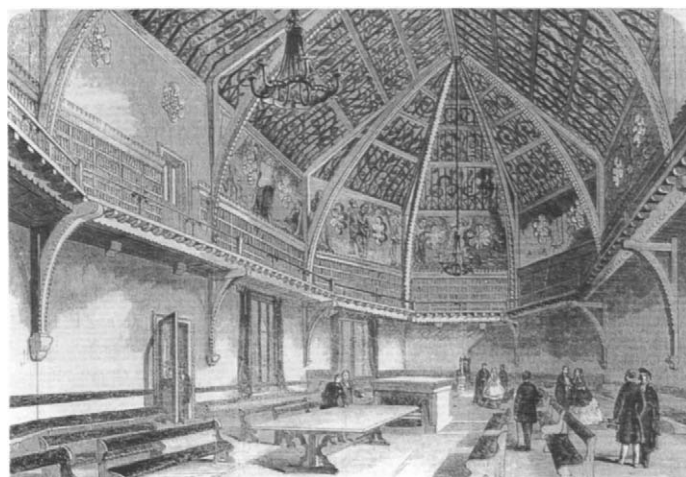


Figure 52. Oxford Union Debating Hall. Contemporary engraving, ca. 1858, showing the murals still incomplete

asked for a £2 loan), the backing of Rossetti and Ruskin, both of whom had the highest regard for his talent, saved him from the worst hardships of a struggling young artist. He might find it “difficult to live,” he wrote in 1858, but he was “thought a most successful beginner, and . . . spoken of in London a great deal.”¹⁴ Following in Rossetti’s footsteps, he seems to have made no attempt to exhibit at either the Royal Academy or the British Institution, but he showed with other members of the circle at the semiprivate Hogarth Club, which was launched in April 1858 and had premises centrally situated in the Piccadilly area. In fact, he played a leading part in its foundation and was on the committee. Nor were the patrons who were already buying from more established Pre-Raphaelites slow to acquire his work. Nearly all were typical of the new breed of middle-class collector to whom the movement appealed so much—the Leeds stockbroker Thomas E. Plint, the Newcastle industrialist James Leathart, the Liverpool tobacco merchant John Miller.

It is some indication of his success that in January 1859, only three years after he had arrived in London with no artistic credentials, he began to teach drawing at the Working Men’s College, the pioneering venture in working-class education that Ruskin, Rossetti, and Madox Brown also supported. He remained on the staff until March 1861, first helping Brown and then taking a class of his own. Much of the respect he commanded was due to his skill as a decorative artist, especially in the field of stained glass. His very first essay in this field, the design of the Good Shepherd, which was to remind Sir John Pope-Hennessy of the models in Harrods’ window, drove Ruskin “wild with joy” when he saw it.¹⁵ As early as 1857,

on Rossetti’s recommendation, he was working for two of the most progressive stained-glass firms of the day, James Powell and Sons and Lavers and Barraud, and although the latter employed him only once (perhaps because he managed to upset the architect William Butterfield), he was soon designing Powell’s most important windows, including those at Christ Church, Oxford, and Waltham Abbey. In April 1861 Morris, at last finding his true *métier* as a visual artist, launched his famous firm of Morris, Marshall, Faulkner & Co., “Fine Art Workmen,” with Rossetti, Burne-Jones, Brown, and Philip Webb (his fellow trainee in Street’s office) all among the founding partners. From then on Burne-Jones’s skills as a decorative artist were almost entirely monopolized by Morris, for whom he was soon decorating furniture and designing tiles and needlework as well as stained glass. The last remained his forte. All three of the firms that had employed him showed his work in this medium at the International Exhibition held at South Kensington in 1862.

During his early years in London Burne-Jones lived at a series of addresses in Bloomsbury, an area long established as London’s bohemian quarter. In August 1856, when Morris moved with Street to London, the friends shared rooms in Upper Gordon Street, and the following November they took a first-floor apartment at 17 Red Lion Square, which had once been tenanted by Rossetti and the short-lived Pre-Raphaelite painter Walter Deverell. But in 1859 this bachelor world was breached when Morris married Jane Burden (1839–1914), the daughter of an Oxford groom and a young woman of unconventional beauty whom he had met while working at the Oxford Union. He also commissioned Webb to design a



Figure 53. Red House, Bexleyheath, Kent. Designed for William Morris by Philip Webb (1831–1915) in 1859



Figure 54. Georgiana Macdonald (1840–1920) in 1856, at the time of her engagement to Edward Burne-Jones



Figure 55. Edward Burne-Jones, *Morgan le Fay*, 1862. Watercolor, 34 $\frac{1}{8}$ x 18 $\frac{7}{8}$ in. (86.5 x 48 cm). London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham, on loan to Leighton House, Kensington

house for him in the country. The result was the famous Red House at Upton in Kent (fig. 53), a plain (by Victorian standards) red-brick building set amid apple orchards and a garden designed to resemble the *hortus conclusus* of a late-medieval illuminated manuscript. The decoration of this idyllic retreat, to which Burne-Jones contributed a series of murals (cat. no. 11), was the prelude to the founding of the firm in 1861.

Meanwhile, in the summer of 1860 both Rossetti and Burne-Jones also married, Rossetti to Lizzie Siddal, the neurotic and perpetually ailing redhead to whom he had been so long engaged, Burne-Jones to Georgiana Macdonald (1840–1920; fig. 54), the twenty-year-old daughter of a Methodist minister whom he had known since the early 1850s, when her father was stationed in Birmingham. Georgie was one of a remarkable galaxy of sisters who would eventually link Burne-



Figure 56. Edward Burne-Jones, *Clerk Saunders*, 1861. Watercolor, 27 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 16 $\frac{1}{2}$ in. (69.9 x 41.8 cm). Tate Gallery, London

Jones, the classical painter Edward Poynter (1836–1919), and two great men of the next generation, Rudyard Kipling and Stanley Baldwin, by ties of marriage. Unlike Jane Morris and Lizzie Rossetti, she did not possess great beauty. Small, with a simple, neat elegance, she reminded Charles Eliot Norton of “a Stothard Grace,”¹⁶ especially when she sang and played the piano, which she did extremely well. What she lacked in appearance, however, was amply made up for in strength of character and an unswerving moral rectitude which could make even the strongest quail. The marriage was far from being without its problems. Burne-Jones placed it under enormous strain by his affair with the Greek beauty Maria Zambaco (cat. no. 49) in the late 1860s, and Georgie’s relentless high-mindedness could get on his nerves, especially in later life when it took a socialistic turn under the influence of Morris. Graham Robertson believed that Burne-Jones’s

addiction to Rabelaisian caricatures was a reaction against his surroundings, which were “so extremely correct and ‘proper.’”¹⁷ But there was never any danger of the marriage collapsing. The couple retained a deep fund of mutual affection, and no doubt Burne-Jones knew only too well how much he depended on Georgie. Not only did she run their household with great efficiency but she acted as his personal assistant, writing many of his letters, relieving him of all business worries, and zealously protecting him from intruders. Lady Frances Balfour (cat. no. 108) described her as “the guardian of B-J’s time, and a very inexorable one,” adding that she found her “rather daunting.”¹⁸ When Burne-Jones boasted, as he often did, of being what today would be called a workaholic, he was paying an unspoken tribute to Georgie, without whose support he would never have been able to spend the long hours in his studio that enabled him to be so prolific. After his death she rendered him the final service of compiling one of the best of the memorial biographies that were accorded to nearly every major Victorian artist.

By about 1860 watercolor was replacing pen and ink as Burne-Jones’s primary technique, this again reflecting the practice of Rossetti. During the early 1860s he painted a distinct group of works in this medium, still small in scale by comparison with the later work. The well-known *Sidonia von Bork* and *Clara von Bork* (cat. nos. 12, 13) are among the earliest examples, and the series culminates with *The Merciful Knight*, of 1863 (cat. no. 26), which to Georgie seemed “to sum up and seal the ten years that had passed since Edward first went to Oxford.”¹⁹ Thematically these pictures represent many of the circle’s literary enthusiasms at this period: Malory (cat. no. 15), Chaucer, border ballads (fig. 56), the fairy tales of Grimm and Perrault (cat. no. 22), Wilhelm Meinhold’s gruesome gothic horror story *Sidonia the Sorceress*. Painted with a good deal of bodycolor and a considerable amount of ox gall, they have a density and richness diametrically opposed to the translucency normally associated with watercolor. Their deep and glowing tones parallel the schemes of rich polychromy and constructional color favored by the Gothic Revival architects with whom his talents as a decorative artist brought him into contact: Benjamin Woodward, William Butterfield, G. E.

Street, William Burges, J. P. Seddon, G. F. Bodley, Philip Webb, William White. Indeed, he had already begun the practice of occasionally developing a stained-glass cartoon as a watercolor, using the design’s sepia outlines as a monochrome underpainting. But this close relationship between painting and design, which remained constant throughout his career despite outward changes of style, was only symptomatic of a fundamental cast of vision, a natural tendency to opt for a decorative effect and to prefer mood and fairy-tale fantasy to drama and psychological insight. This is the great difference between Burne-Jones and Rossetti, for whom the latter qualities were paramount, certainly at this early period. Burne-Jones, wrote Ruskin in 1859, is “the most wonderful of all the Pre-Raphaelites in redundancy of delicate and pathetic fancy—inferior to Rossetti in depth—but beyond him in grace and sweetness.”²⁰

1. *Memorials*, vol. 1, p. 115.
2. *Ibid.*, vol. 2, pp. 168, 333.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 294.
4. Osbert Sitwell, ed., *A Free House! Or, The Artist as Craftsman: The Writings of Walter Richard Sickert* (London, 1947), p. 311.
5. *Memorials*, vol. 1, p. 127.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 149.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 151.
8. Oswald Doughty, *A Victorian Romantic: Dante Gabriel Rossetti*, 2d ed. (London, 1960), p. 207.
9. See Julian Treuherz, “The Pre-Raphaelite and Medieval Illuminated Manuscripts,” in *Pre-Raphaelite Papers*, edited by Leslie Parris (London, 1984), pp. 153–69.
10. Sara Norton and M. A. DeWolfe Howe, eds., *Letters of Charles Eliot Norton* (London, 1913), vol. 1, p. 342.
11. Mackail (1899) 1950, p. 110.
12. Rossetti, *Letters*, vol. 1 (1965), p. 319. For further information on the influence of Dürer, see John Christian, “Early German Sources for Pre-Raphaelite Designs,” *Art Quarterly* 36 (spring–summer 1973), pp. 56–83.
13. Rossetti, *Letters*, vol. 1 (1965), p. 336.
14. *Memorials*, vol. 1, p. 185.
15. Vallance 1900, p. 2.
16. Norton and Howe, *Letters of Charles Eliot Norton*, vol. 1, p. 344.
17. Robertson, *Letters*, p. 491.
18. Lady Frances Balfour, *Ne Obliviscaris* (London, 1930), vol. 1, pp. 229, 237.
19. *Memorials*, vol. 1, p. 262.
20. Van Akin Burd, ed., *The Winington Letters: John Ruskin’s Correspondence with Margaret Alexis Bell and the Children at Winington Hall* (London, 1969), p. 150.



I

I.

Archibald Maclaren (1819–1884)

The Fairy Family: A Series of Ballads and Metrical Tales Illustrating the Fairy Faith of Europe

1857

London: Longmans, 1857 8". Frontispiece, title page, and tailpiece by Edward Burne-Jones

Inscribed on flyleaf: This book I bought in 1895 at the suggestion of William Morris, who pointed out to me the description in a bookseller's catalogue—and said "Don't let Burne-Jones know that I told you, but that book contains his earliest illustrations." A year or so later I gave it to Charles Fairfax Murray who today gave it back to me. Sydney C.

Cockerell Cambridge Oct 24 1917

PROVENANCE: Sydney Cockerell; Charles Fairfax Murray; returned to Cockerell; bequeathed by him, 1927

EXHIBITED: Arts Council 1975–76, no. 8

Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery (1927P1616)

2.

Design for "The Fairy Family": The Elf-Folk

ca. 1854–56

Pen, black ink, and wash, 5¼ x 3¾ in. (14.4 x 9.6 cm)

Inscribed: Whisper Whisper

PROVENANCE: Archibald Maclaren; Sotheby's, November 10, 1981, lot 27 (part of album bought by Christopher Wood); presented by Frederick R. Koch, 1982

EXHIBITED: Arts Council 1975–76, no. 9

The Pierpont Morgan Library, New York (1982.10, fol. 42)

NEW YORK AND PARIS



2



3

3. Design for “The Fairy Family”: Fata Morgana

ca. 1854–56

Pencil, pen and ink, and wash, $5\frac{1}{4} \times 3\frac{3}{4}$ in. (14.4 x 9.6 cm)

PROVENANCE: See cat. no. 2

EXHIBITED: Arts Council 1975–76, no. 9

The Pierpont Morgan Library, New York. Purchased as the gift of
Mr. Frederick R. Koch, 1982 (1982.10, fol. 39)

NEW YORK AND PARIS

As Sydney Cockerell’s inscription in this very rare book confirms, Burne-Jones later disowned this first attempt at book illustration, as he did all his juvenilia; its authorship was never publicly disclosed in his lifetime. Archibald Maclaren (1819–1884) was a man of many interests who ran a gymnasium in Oxford popular with undergraduates.¹ He became a friend of both William Morris and Burne-Jones, who recorded that “his talk was admirable and his tastes inclin[ed] greatly to poetry.”² The introduction to *The Fairy Family* reveals a wide knowledge of literary sources, such as Sir Walter Scott’s essay “Fairies of Popular Superstition” in *Border Minstrelsy* (1802–3) and Thomas Keightley’s *Fairy Mythology*, first published in 1828 and reissued in 1850.

The frontispiece to the later edition of Keightley’s book, by George Cruikshank, combines several scenes and includes

myriad small figures in strange landscape settings. This may have served as an initial inspiration to Burne-Jones when Maclaren asked him in 1854 to illustrate the twenty-three ballads that make up the book, beginning with “The Elf-Folk,” for which “Whisper, Whisper” (cat. no. 2) is the main design. This and the title page (together with a tailpiece depicting a river spirit) were the only subjects eventually used as illustrations when the book was published in 1857. Over a period of two years Burne-Jones made no fewer than eighty-eight pen-and-ink drawings for the book, ranging from slight sketches and animated initial letters to further full-page designs such as the dramatic shipwreck in “Fata Morgana” shown here:³

On rushed the ship: from every cloud

A quivering tongue of lightning flashed,

And, hissing, traced each stay and shroud,

While all around the thunder crashed.

The later drawings show a clearly detectable stylistic influence of Dante Gabriel Rossetti, whose work Burne-Jones first encountered in 1855. Personal acquaintance with Rossetti in the following year, and the decision to become a professional artist, led to the abandonment of what must have seemed embarrassingly naive and faltering first attempts as a draftsman, which nonetheless underline Burne-Jones’s innate romanticism and fertile imagination.

1. For a thorough account of Maclaren and the background to the *Fairy Family* illustrations, see Christian 1985.

2. *Memorials*, vol. 1, p. 81.

3. The majority of the designs remained together in an album, whose contents are now in the Pierpont Morgan Library, New York, together with six additional drawings; seven others remain in a private collection.

4. The Good Shepherd

Designed 1857; executed 1861 by James Powell and Sons
Stained-glass panel, $52 \times 20\frac{1}{8}$ in. (132 x 51 cm)

EXHIBITED: Victoria and Albert Museum 1996, no. H.1a

The United Reformed Church in Maidstone

It was apparently at Rossetti’s suggestion (Rossetti having declined the invitation himself) that James Powell and Sons of Whitefriars, one of the leading London manufacturers of stained glass before the establishment of Morris, Marshall, Faulkner & Co. in April 1861, approached Burne-Jones, who was to produce four significant designs for the firm (see also cat. no. 9). The cartoon for *The Good Shepherd*, signed and dated 1857 and now in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, is generally accepted as Burne-Jones’s earliest identified design for decorative art.¹ According to Rossetti, the design had “driven Ruskin wild with joy. . . . Christ is here represented as a real Shepherd, in such dress as is fit for walking the fields and hills. He carries the lost sheep on His shoulder, and it is chewing some vine leaves which are wound round his hat—a lovely idea, is it not?”



Edward Burne-Jones. Cartoon for *The Good Shepherd*, 1857. Watercolor and ink, 50³/₈ x 18³/₄ in. (128 x 47.7 cm). Victoria and Albert Museum, London

A loaf and a bottle of wine, the Sacred Elements, hang at His girdle; and behind him is a wonderful piece of Gothic landscape."²

The freshness of the conception and the Pre-Raphaelite naturalism it embraces are indeed more striking than the bright coloring of the glass itself and the overall flatness of effect, which may seem a little garish and unsubtle in comparison with the better-made and more carefully painted glass that William Morris would later produce. No less remarkable is the thorough understanding of two-dimensional design shown by a young artist with no formal training or previous experience.

The panel, which was made for the center light of the east window of the Congregational Church in Maidstone, Kent (now demolished), seems to have been executed only in 1861. This was a commission from the Reverend H. H. Dobney, editor of the *Christian Spectator* and apparently himself "an artist of no mean order"; Martin Harrison has speculated on the likelihood of personal contact between Dobney and Burne-Jones, who is known to have visited Maidstone in the late 1850s to see his friend the painter Arthur Hughes (1832–1915).³

Another version of *The Good Shepherd* was made by Powell's for the Church of Saint Patrick in Trim, County Meath, Ireland, in 1869.

1. Arts Council 1975–76, no. 55, and Victoria and Albert Museum 1996, no. H.1b; for Burne-Jones's work for Powell's, see Sewter 1974–75, vol. 2, pp. 1–4, and John Christian, "Source Material: The Archives of the Whitefriars Studio, London," *Artifex* 1 (1968), pp. 30–46.

2. Letter from Rossetti, quoted in Vallance 1900, p. 2.

3. Martin Harrison, "Church Decoration and Stained Glass," in Victoria and Albert Museum 1996, p. 116.





5

5. The Knight's Farewell

1858

Pen and ink on vellum, $6\frac{1}{4} \times 7\frac{1}{2}$ in. (15.9 x 19.1 cm)

Signed: EBJ 1858

PROVENANCE: William Morris; May Morris; Kelmscott Manor sale, July 19, 1939, lot 343; bequeathed by John Bryson, 1977

EXHIBITED: Burlington Fine Arts Club 1899, no. 132; Arts Council 1975–76, no. 12

The Visitors of the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford (1977.34)

BIRMINGHAM AND PARIS

6.

Going to the Battle

1858

Pen and ink with gray wash on vellum, $8\frac{7}{8} \times 7\frac{1}{4}$ in. (22.5 x 19.5 cm)

PROVENANCE: Richard Mills, by 1861; his sale, Christie's, April 13, 1908, lot 4, bought by J. R. Holliday; bequeathed by him, 1927

EXHIBITED: Burlington Fine Arts Club 1899, no. 15; Arts Council 1975–76, no. 13; Victoria and Albert Museum 1996, no. G.6

Lent by the Syndics of the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge (1223)

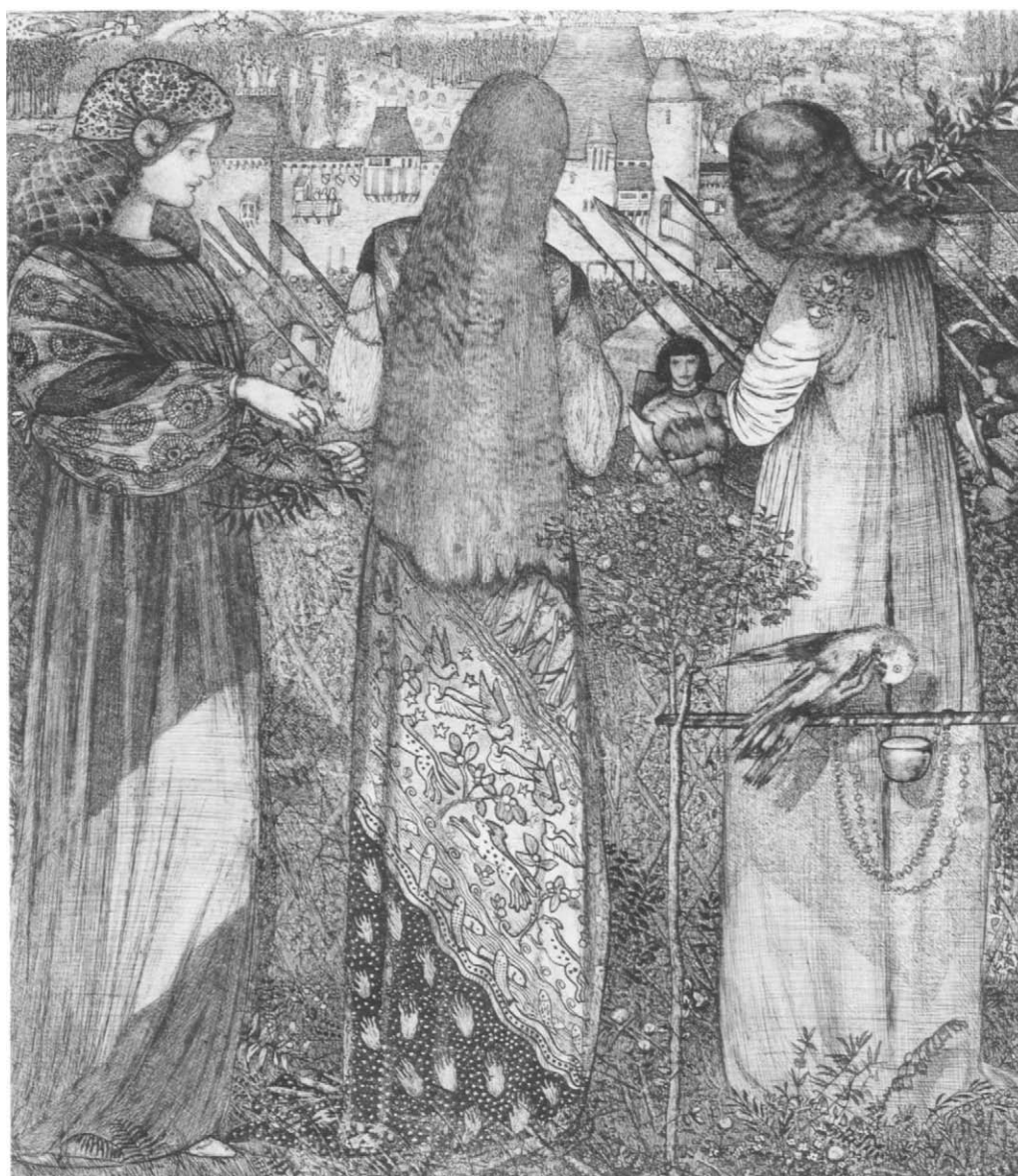
BIRMINGHAM ONLY

Burne-Jones seems to have suffered ill health in his earliest years as an artist—the use of oil paints apparently made him unwell—and his first completed works were elaborate pen-and-ink drawings, often on vellum, taken to a high degree of finish with the most minutely observed detail. They thus display the twin influences of Rossetti, who had made

similar drawings in the early 1850s, and John Ruskin, whose practical manual *The Elements of Drawing*, published in 1857, advocated exactly such a devotion to detail and finish. After a first design of 1856, *The Waxen Image* (whereabouts unknown), and a few other experiments in the medium, Burne-Jones began a series of romantic medieval subjects in which many of his later preoccupations, and his natural abilities as a decorative artist, make their first appearance.

Although they use the same compression of two-dimensional space for their overall effect, Burne-Jones's drawings differ from Rossetti's medievalizing watercolors of 1857 (such as *The Blue Closet* and *The Tune of Seven Towers*, in the Tate Gallery, London) in having outdoor settings. The figures in both *The Knight's Farewell* and *Going to the Battle* are shown in enclosed gardens. In the latter, such is the density of patternmaking that the mounted knights in the background can only just be discerned. The courtier in *The Knight's Farewell* reads from a book inscribed "Roman du Quete du Sangrail," which acts as a reminder of the artist's recent participation in the scheme of Arthurian murals at the Oxford Union Society.

The favorite motif of a frieze of knights with spears or banners—reused in the *Saint Frideswide* cartoons (see cat. no. 9), *Chant d'Amour* (cat. no. 84), and the Holy Grail tapestries (cat. no. 148)—becomes clearer in *Going to the Battle*, one of the most sophisticated of the entire series, where the full-length female figures cleverly bind together the layered composition. Burne-Jones's delight in decorative detail is evident not only in the effective naturalistic depiction of a parrot on its perch but also in the inventive design of doves, dogs, and fish on the central figure's dress. It has been suggested that both this drawing and Rossetti's watercolor *Before the Battle* (1857–58; Museum of Fine Arts, Boston) may have been inspired by Morris's poem "The Sailing of the Sword," from his first book of verse, *The Defence of Guenevere*, published in



6

March 1858, in which three courtly ladies bid farewell to their knights.¹

The other important pen-and-ink drawings of this type are *Kings' Daughters* (1858; private collection)² and *Sir Galahad* (1858; Fogg Art Museum, Cambridge, Mass.),³ in which the knight on horseback in sharp profile strongly recalls Albrecht Dürer's engraving *The Knight, Death, and the Devil* (1517), which Burne-Jones would have known by this date. In a letter of February 1857 to William Bell Scott, Rossetti appropriately commended Burne-Jones's ink drawings as "marvels in finish and imaginative detail, unequalled by anything except perhaps Albert Dürer's finest work."⁴

1. Victoria and Albert Museum 1996, p. 101.

2. Arts Council 1975–76, no. 14.

3. Fogg Art Museum 1946, no. 5.

4. Quoted in John Christian, "Early German Sources for Pre-Raphaelite Designs," *Art Quarterly* 36 (1973), p. 64, where the Pre-Raphaelites' interest in Dürer's work is fully discussed.

Buondelmonte's Wedding

1859

Pen and ink with gray wash on vellum, 10 x 30¼ in. (25.5 x 77 cm)
Signed: EBJ. Artist's name, address (24 Russell Place, Fitzroy Square),
and the date 1859 inscribed on reverse of frame, which is inscribed
FLORENCE AD 1215 and decorated with emblems

PROVENANCE: T. E. Plint; his sale, Christie's, March 7, 1862, lot 50,
bought by J. Anderson Rose; his sale, Christie's, March 23, 1867, lot 26,
bought by Scott; James Leathart; his sale, Christie's, June 19, 1897, lot 8,
bought by Dunthorne; Charles Fairfax Murray, by whom bequeathed,
1909

EXHIBITED: Goupil Gallery, London, 1896, no. 41; Burlington Fine Arts
Club 1899, no. 10; Arts Council 1975-76, no. 18

Lent by the Syndics of the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge (678)
NEW YORK AND PARIS

"The drawing illustrates the event which led to the outbreak of the Guelph and Ghibelline quarrel in Florence in 1215. Buondelmonte de' Buondelmonti, a young nobleman of Guelph affiliations, was betrothed to a lady of a Ghibelline house, the Amidei; but Gualdrada Donati, an ambitious widow belonging to another Guelph family, determined he should marry her daughter instead. The girl was of great beauty, and by suddenly presenting her to him as he rode in the streets of Florence, and arguing that in any case it behoved him to marry a Guelph, the widow succeeded in making him break his existing engagement. The Amidei and their supporters thereupon killed him in revenge, thus starting a chain of recriminatory murders and battles. In the drawing, the spectator stands with his back to the river Arno; at the northern end of the Ponte Vecchio. On the left the widow Donati is seen presenting her daughter to Buondelmonte, while on the right his betrothed bride of the Amidei arrives for the wedding by barge, guided by a blindfold figure of Cupid. In the centre is the statue of Mars which stood on the old bridge, and at the foot of which, on Easter Sunday, Buondelmonte's death took place. The middle-dis-

tance is crowded with scenes of preparation for the marriage."¹

This is the most elaborate of seven designs connected with Burne-Jones's intention, expressed in his retrospective list of works, to paint "a large oil picture of the Wedding of Buondelmonte," which is not known ever to have been begun. The others are sketches, in pencil and ink, that concentrate on Buondelmonte's fatal meeting with the widow Donati's daughter.² The story is twice referred to in Dante's *Divine Comedy*, and was given in detail in Machiavelli's *History of Florence*. It is probable that Burne-Jones saw the painting by G. F. Watts, *Guelphs and Ghibellines*, when he was staying at Little Holland House during the summer of 1858.

According to G. P. Boyce, Burne-Jones started work on the design in January 1859, though it was not completed until Christmas.³ In the autumn the artist had visited Italy for the first time, and the incorporation of an Italianate landscape background and larger foreground scenes, with figures of a distinctly Venetian character, seems to reflect Burne-Jones's first-hand study of early Renaissance painting. The decorative devices on the frame include the fleur-de-lis of Florence and eagles, probably alluding to the rival claims to the Holy Roman Empire of Otto IV and Frederick II, who were supported respectively by the Guelph and Ghibelline factions in Florence.⁴

Buondelmonte's Wedding was owned successively by some of the most distinguished patrons of the Pre-Raphaelites, beginning with the Leeds collector Thomas Plint; J. Anderson Rose also owned the large drawing *The Backgammon Players* (cat. no. 16).

1. Arts Council 1975-76, p. 23.

2. Christian 1973a, pls. 31-36.

3. "Jones showed me the commencement of a pen and ink drawing for Ruskin—subject from Florentine history" (Surtees 1980, p. 26, entry for January 17, 1859). There is no further indication that the drawing was ever offered to Ruskin or that it belonged to him.

4. Arts Council 1975-76, p. 22.





8.

The Wise and Foolish Virgins

1859

Pen and ink with gray wash, 17 $\frac{1}{8}$ x 23 $\frac{3}{4}$ in. (45.5 x 60.5 cm)

PROVENANCE: T. E. Plint; his sale, Christie's, March 7, 1862, lot 46;

George Rae; Sotheby's, November 5, 1974, lot 25

EXHIBITED: New Gallery 1892–93, no. 155; Arts Council 1975–76, no. 16

Private collection, London

Looking back in 1896 on his first works, Burne-Jones found that “the little early ones didn’t give me the shock I expected. There was such a passion to express in them and so little ability to do it. They were like earnest passionate stammerings.”¹ In this, the largest and most carefully wrought of his pen-and-ink drawings, he injected into a biblical parable—that of the five wise virgins who attended to their duties and the five who did not—a remarkable element of romantic passion.

The composition, and the specific framing of Christ’s head within a window opening, is closely comparable to that of Rossetti’s large-scale ink drawing *Mary Magdalene at the Door*

of *Simon the Pharisee* (Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge), begun in 1858 but probably not completed until 1859. According to a work list in an early sketchbook, now in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, *The Wise and Foolish Virgins* was executed in 1859. The motif of a lock gate appears in the *Fairy Family* album (cat. nos. 2, 3), while the compression of the figures on the right side is similar to that in scenes from the *Saint Frideswide* stained-glass cartoons (cat. no. 9). The two main female figures, however, show Burne-Jones’s growing confidence in the handling of three-dimensional form, as well as his increasing fascination with the effects of heavily folded drapery. Both elements would again be combined in one of his earliest watercolors, *The Blessed Damozel* (1860; Fogg Art Museum, Cambridge, Mass.), which depicts a similar figure.

Three studies in the Victoria and Albert Museum and three small unfinished designs for the finished composition demonstrate the artist’s technique of pen work over a preparatory pencil outline, excising redundant darker touches with the knife. In no other finished drawing does Burne-Jones take the accumulation of ink lines to such a velvety richness, brilliantly enhanced by reserving the white ground for highlights.

1. Quoted in Fitzgerald 1975, pp. 84–85.



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9.

Scenes from the Life of Saint Frideswide

1859; retouched ca. 1890

Oil on paper, laid down on canvas, 72¼ x 30⅞ in. (183.5 x 78.3 cm)

PROVENANCE: Myles Birket Foster; W. Graham Robertson

EXHIBITED: Arts Council 1975–76, no. 59 (first cartoon in the series)

The Cheltenham Ladies' College

In the same year he designed *The Good Shepherd* (cat. no. 4), Burne-Jones designed a three-light window for Powell and Sons for the dining hall at Saint Andrew's College, Bradfield, Kent (fig. 4). Depicting Adam and Eve after the Fall, Building the Tower of Babel, and Solomon and the Queen of Sheba, the window continues the use of large-scale figures defined in blocks of color, a method also employed for a design of the Annunciation (ca. 1860) at Saint Columba, Topcliffe, Yorkshire, Burne-Jones's only work for the firm of Lavers and Barraud.¹ For two much more substantial commissions from Powell's in 1859 and 1860, he adopted a style closer to his own work in ink and watercolor, adding brilliant color to narrative panels filled with incident and numerous figures. A series of scenes from the life of Saint Frideswide, the city's patron saint, was chosen for a window in the Latin Chapel at Christ Church Cathedral, Oxford, then under restoration by Benjamin Woodward (1815–1861), the architect of the Oxford Union Society, who may well have encountered the young Burne-Jones during the mural campaign in the summer of 1857. As the focus of a similar restoration of a major medieval church, Waltham Abbey in Essex, a Tree of Jesse design for the east window was commissioned through the architect William Burges (1827–1881); by the time a section of it was shown by Powell's at the International Exhibition held at South Kensington in 1862, Burne-Jones had transferred his allegiance to the firm founded by his friend William Morris the previous year.²

According to twelfth-century sources, Frideswide, the daughter of the Saxon King Didan of Oxford, was leading a virtuous life in charge of a nunnery founded by her father when Algar, King of Leicester, demanded her hand in marriage. Rather than break her vow of chastity, she fled, outwitting her pursuers, while Algar was miraculously struck blind by a divine thunderbolt. On renouncing her, his sight was restored by the saint, who lived peacefully thereafter.³ The section shown here (the fifth in a set of eight cartoons, representing the upper half of the third light) depicts Saint Frideswide in a boat, having left the pigsty where she had hidden and reaching the safety of her convent just as soldiers pass by. The mounted figure is strongly reminiscent (although in reverse) of Burne-Jones's pen-and-ink drawing *Sir Galahad* (1858; Fogg Art Museum, Cambridge, Mass.).

Burne-Jones's watercolor sketch-design (now in the Aberdeen Art Gallery) conveys the narrative in the form of a strip cartoon in five layers, its scenes unified by the river Isis winding to the

bottom of the composition.⁴ For practical execution, however, the design is compressed into sixteen scenes, four to each lancet of the window, reading from top to bottom. The result is a kaleidoscopic riot of color (predominantly red, blue, and green) and myriad detail. Overtones of Rossettian Pre-Raphaelitism and a deliberate quaintness infusing the overall treatment make this window one of the most imaginative and delightful pieces of Gothic Revival decorative art. It was the first work by Burne-Jones to be praised by the art critic F. G. Stephens (1828–1907), a founding member of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, who wrote in the *Athenaeum*, “Each incident is full of little illustrative points, at times pretty, humorous or pathetic, always suggestive, apt and poetical. The series is, in fact, the work of an artist who perfectly enters into the heart of the mediaeval feeling, and rightly places in a Gothic cathedral a series of designs conceived in a Gothic style.”⁵

Interestingly, the success of this early work was appreciated over thirty years later by the architect Henry Wilson (1864–1934), writing in the *Architectural Review* that Burne-Jones’s cartoons “look less like carefully ordered designs for fixed spaces than panels cut from some rich tapestry, crowded with story and incident. They flash on one like glimpses of some passing pageant made permanent for our delight, windows in the walls of fact letting us into the world of fancy.”⁶ The cartoons have had a checkered career: painted over in oils by 1862, they were divided into eight sections and framed as a screen that was used to furnish the Burne-Joneses’ lodgings in Great Russell Street. Acquired in 1865 by the artist Myles Birket Foster (1825–1899), from whom Burne-Jones received a number of commissions (cat. nos. 23–25, 31 et seq.),⁷ they were sold by Foster in about 1890 to the painter and collector W. Graham Robertson (1866–1948), who then dismantled the screen, “framing each separately in a narrow band of black, under Burne-Jones’s direction.”⁸ With great reluctance, Robertson allowed his old friend to begin retouching the cartoons, but realized his mistake and, after a tussle, recovered them. Four of the set show distinct signs, especially in the broader landscape backgrounds, of the artist’s later style superimposed on the earlier work. This panel, however, appears to be unscathed. The original arched top would have been squared off in 1862.

1. Sewter 1974–75, vol. 2, pp. 1, 3, vol. 1, pl. 17, colorpl. 2.

2. Ibid., vol. 2, p. 2, pls. 23–25; a version of the center light, which may have been the panel shown in 1862, is now in the Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery (M177).

3. The legend and its historical context are discussed in John Blair, ed., *Saint Frideswide: Patron of Oxford* (Oxford, 1988).

4. Sewter 1974–75, vol. 1, pl. 20.

5. *Athenaeum*, October 20, 1860, p. 521.

6. Wilson 1896–97, p. 180.

7. A photograph showing the screen in a studio room at The Hill, Foster’s house in Witley, Surrey, is reproduced in Jan Reynolds, *Birket Foster* (London, 1984), p. 105, fig. 68.

8. Robertson 1931, pp. 282–84. “If a picture actually wants retouching in order, for instance, to hide an accidental injury, the artist who produced it many years ago is the last man who should be allowed to touch it, because, quite erroneously, he imagines himself still to be the man who painted it and therefore falls upon it without mercy or respect.”

10.

The Adoration of the Kings and Shepherds (center); The Annunciation (wings)

1860

Oil on canvas, center, 42 $\frac{7}{8}$ x 61 $\frac{7}{8}$ in. (109 x 156 cm); wings, each 42 $\frac{7}{8}$ x 28 $\frac{3}{4}$ in. (109 x 73 cm)

PROVENANCE: T. E. Plint estate; bought by G. F. Bodley, 1867

EXHIBITED: New Gallery 1898–99, nos. 7, 8; Arts Council 1975–76, no. 66; Victoria and Albert Museum 1996, no. H.4

Tate Gallery, London. Presented by G. H. Bodley in memory of George Frederick Bodley, 1934 (NO4743)

The artist’s largest work to date in oils, this triptych was painted in 1860 for Saint Paul’s Church, Brighton (1846–48), an early work of the mature Gothic Revival designed by Richard Cromwell Carpenter (1812–1855). In response to criticism in the *Ecclesiologist* magazine that the high altar lacked a proper focus, the architect George Frederick Bodley (1827–1907), already on friendly terms with Morris and his circle, “unselfishly suggested that the church should have a painted altarpiece instead of a reredos, which he himself had been asked to design, and that Edward [Burne-Jones] should be the artist employed.”¹ The work must have been well under way by the summer of 1860, as it was commended by J. P. Seddon at a meeting of the Ecclesiological Society on June 11.² On its completion, however, the artist “found that the composition of the centre panel was too elaborate to tell its story clearly from a distance.”³ He therefore decided to paint a second version, simplifying the composition of the *Adoration* by removing the female attendants and the shepherds and raising the kings to a standing position on the right; it was installed in 1861 and remained in place until 1975.⁴

The original triptych was accepted by the executors of the Leeds collector Thomas Plint, who had died suddenly in 1862, leaving a number of artists (Rossetti was among them) to make good advances of money for work not yet completed. After then passing through several hands, it fortuitously attracted the attention of Bodley, who bought it in 1867 for £50 from a man “who had no idea but that it was an old Italian picture.”⁵

It does indeed have the appearance of an early Renaissance “goldback”—in this case, literally—emphasized by the figures of the Magi in stark profile, as if they were donor portraits. The Virgin Mary and the first king are clearly representations of Jane and William Morris; the shepherd with the bagpipes has the features of the poet Algernon Charles Swinburne (1837–1909), with Burne-Jones himself behind him. The model for the king in armor was identified by Georgiana Burne-Jones as a handsome Italian organ-grinder named Ciamelli.

Burne-Jones must have had in his mind Rossetti’s similar triptych altarpiece *The Seed of David*, begun in 1858 as a commission, through Seddon, for Llandaff Cathedral (in which Morris figures as King David), but would also have



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been familiar with Renaissance models seen in Italy in 1859. Again a Venetian influence pervades the central *Adoration*—the king in armor carries echoes of Carpaccio—although the wings, with their curtained backgrounds and floral decoration, recall such Florentine treatments as the celebrated *Annunciation* (ca. 1440–ca. 1452) of Fra Angelico in the Convent of San Marco.⁶ Denoting the gradual development of an individual style, this eclectic combination is less evident in the second version of the triptych, where there is a greater consistency of scale and an intimate atmosphere between the wings and the centerpiece.

1. *Memorials*, vol. 1, p. 124.
2. As noted by Martin Harrison in *Victoria and Albert Museum* 1996, p. 119.
3. *Memorials*, vol. 1, p. 124.
4. After its appearance in the Arts Council exhibition of 1975–76 (no. 67), the triptych was spurned by the church authorities and lent to the Brighton Museum and Art Gallery before being sold at Sotheby's on November 3, 1993 (lot 192, illus.); it is now in the collection of Lord Lloyd-Webber.
5. *Memorials*, vol. 1, p. 124. This is confirmed by an entry in William Michael Rossetti's diary for January 16, 1867: "Jones . . . says his triptych of the Adoration of the Magi sold lately for £7 at a sale of effects, since when Bodley has re-purchased it for £50" (William M. Rossetti, comp., *Rossetti Papers, 1862–1870* [London, 1903], p. 221).
6. See Parkinson 1975, pp. 322–23.



Edward Burne-Jones, *The Adoration of the Kings and Shepherds* and *The Annunciation*, first version, 1860–61. Oil on canvas, center panel 42½ x 61½ in. (108 x 156.5 cm), side panels each 42½ x 29 in. (108 x 73.5 cm). Private collection



II.

Studies for "The Wedding Feast of Sir Degrevaunt"

1860

Watercolor and bodycolor, 11 1/8 x 18 1/2 in. (30 x 47 cm)

Signed lower right: E. Jones 1860

PROVENANCE: Presented by Charles Fairfax Murray, 1909

EXHIBITED: Arts Council 1975–76, no. 65; Fitzwilliam Museum 1980, no. 15; Musée des Beaux-Arts de Nantes 1992, no. 6; Victoria and Albert Museum 1996, no. G.12

Lent by the Syndics of the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge (677)

In June 1860 William Morris and his wife, Jane, moved into Red House, designed by Philip Webb (1831–1915), and with the help of their friends began a scheme of decoration that included the kind of stained glass, hand-painted tiles, and furniture which would become the earliest products of the firm of Morris, Marshall, Faulkner & Co., founded the following year. Burne-Jones wrote in February 1862 that Morris was “slowly making Red House the beautifullest place on earth,”¹ and made his own contribution with a series of wall paintings in the drawing room, on either side of a great wooden settle. Morris’s biographer, J.W. Mackail, records that after their own marriage in June 1860, Edward and Georgiana Burne-Jones



habitually spent their Sundays at Red House, and it has been suggested that Georgie may have been the model for the figure on the left in this watercolor.

The narrative for the paintings was taken from the fifteenth-century tale of Sir Degreveant, in the 1844 edition of *Thornton's Romances*, published by the Camden Society. The only subjects completed were of a wedding procession, ceremony, and feast, appropriately including idealized depictions of the Morrises as Sir Degreveant and his bride.² Preparatory designs for the murals include elaborate but unfinished studies in pen and ink for each of the major panels, as well as two sheets of predominantly female figures worked up in watercolor, of which this is one.³

While the ink drawings and the wall paintings themselves betray a lingering debt to the claustrophobic style of Rossetti's medievalist watercolors, this exquisite group of figure studies shows, in addition to his innate sense of decorative design, an absorption of the mood and rich coloring of Venetian Renaissance painting, which Burne-Jones had studied on his first visit to Italy in the autumn of 1859.⁴ The half-length figure at the top right, with her distinctly Venetian pose and headdress, bears close comparison with that in the unfinished oil dating from about 1861, identified as *Hope* (cat. no. 19).

1. Mackail 1899, vol. 1, p. 159.

2. *The Wedding Feast* is reproduced in Victoria and Albert Museum 1996, p. 139, fig. 58.

3. Studies for *The Wedding Procession* are in the Royal Institute of British Architects (Arts Council 1975–76, no. 64) and the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge (Fitzwilliam Museum 1980, no. 16); one study for *The Wedding Feast* was sold at Christie's, March 13, 1973, lot 35. The watercolor comparable with the present sheet, which shows the two central foreground figures of a serving maid and a Chaucer-like guest reading a manuscript, is in a Canadian private collection (Art Gallery of Ontario 1993–94, no. A:2).

4. An album of copies after the Old Masters, including some made in Venice in 1859, is in the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge (Arts Council 1975–76, no. 333).

12.

Sidonia von Bork

1860

Watercolor with bodycolor, 13 x 6¼ in. (33 x 17 cm)

Signed and dated on scroll lower right: 1860 E. Burne Jones fecit

Original oak mount inscribed below: Sidonia von Bork 1560

PROVENANCE: Bought from the artist by James Leathart; exhibited after his death at the Goupil Gallery, London; bought by W. Graham Robertson, who bequeathed it to the Tate Gallery in 1948

EXHIBITED: New Gallery 1892–93, no. 11; New Gallery 1898–99, no. 24; Tate Gallery 1933, no. 33; Arts Council 1975–76, no. 24; Tate Gallery 1997–98, no. 20

Tate Gallery, London. Bequeathed by W. Graham Robertson, 1948 (N05878)

BIRMINGHAM AND PARIS

In the early 1860s Burne-Jones exchanged pen and ink for watercolor as his primary medium, and these two imaginary portraits (cat. nos. 12, 13) are among the earliest results. Though still in a tight and finicky style which looks back to his pen-and-ink drawings, the two pictures show him already using bodycolor to create an effect reminiscent of oils, an approach that remained characteristic throughout his later work.

The pictures were painted during the summer of 1860 and completed by August, when the young artist and his wife, Georgiana, who had married in June, went to stay at Red House, Upton, in Kent, the newly built home of their friends William and Jane Morris. In October the frames were being made by Burne-Jones's father, who ran a small carving and gilding business in Birmingham. Still on the paintings, they are rare examples of their maker's handiwork, for reasons later explained by Lady Burne-Jones: "The father was very happy in framing his son's pictures, but, alas, any original design which must be exactly carried out baffled the skill of his small workshop, and Edward had gently and by degrees to let the arrangement drop."¹ The pictures were bought by James Leathart (1820–1895), the Newcastle industrialist. The owner of one of the finest collections of Pre-Raphaelite paintings, he was typical of the self-made middle-class men who were the artist's most loyal and appreciative patrons.² Leathart also owned *Buondelmonte's Wedding* (cat. no. 7) and *The Merciful Knight* (cat. no. 26). After his death the collection was dispersed by the Goupil Gallery, and the two von Bork watercolors were acquired by Graham Robertson, the young aesthete whose later recollections of Burne-Jones are so often quoted in this catalogue. A version of *Sidonia von Bork* (private collection), also painted in 1860, was acquired by another important early patron, the Leeds stockbroker T. E. Plint.

The paintings illustrate *Sidonia von Bork: Die Klosterhexe*, a spine-chilling Gothic romance by Johann Wilhelm Meinhold (1797–1851) which was published in 1847 and reissued two years later in an English translation by Lady Wilde, Oscar Wilde's mother, under the title *Sidonia the Sorceress*. Written in the form of a contemporary chronicle, the story traces the career of a woman of noble Pomeranian family who in 1620, at the age of eighty, was burned as a witch at Stettin. Of such beauty that all who see her fall in love with her, Sidonia is also incurably vicious. In alliance with her lover, the leader of a gang of outlaws, and latterly at the convent of Marienfliess (hence the book's original title), she pursues a life of crime, eventually bewitching the entire ruling house of Pomerania and thereby causing their death or sterility. Here she is seen (according to the date on the mount) as a young woman of twenty, meditating some outrage at the decorous court of the dowager Duchess of Wolgast, the scene of her early crimes. The Duchess herself advances in the distance.

Meinhold's work gained currency in England as part of the vogue for German Romantic literature. He was best known for an earlier story, *Mary Schweidler: The Amber Witch*, which is set in Coserow, a village on the Prussian shore of the Baltic Sea

where he was pastor, at the time of the Thirty Years' War. First published in 1843, the book inspired two English translations and was adapted as an opera by W. V. Wallace, staged at Her Majesty's Theatre, London, in February 1861. Both books were admired in Rossetti's circle, but *Sidonia* was undoubtedly the favorite. Rossetti himself conceived a "positive passion" for it³ and declared that no work of fiction had impressed him so much until he read Emily Brontë's masterpiece *Wuthering Heights* (1847) in 1854.⁴ Swinburne listed it among his hundred favorite books⁵ and claimed that it was a "real work of genius," albeit "the most horrible in literature,"⁶ while Morris's lifelong admiration is evinced by the fact that he reprinted Lady Wilde's translation at the Kelmscott Press in 1893. In the late 1850s the book served much the same purpose as Malory's *Morte d'Arthur* and the poetry of Robert Browning, two other esoteric literary tastes that the set embraced with relish, providing them with a convenient stick with which to beat the philistine. If Ruskin ever told them that his friend Ellen Heaton was "scandalized" by *Sidonia*, they would no doubt have been delighted.⁷

But there was more to the craze than an opportunity to demonstrate exclusivity and *épater les bourgeois*. Meinhold has a superb visual sense, tricking his story out in brilliant colors and a wealth of picturesque detail, while his combined themes of beauty, evil, and magic proved irresistible to a collective imagination dominated by Rossetti. By nature deeply superstitious, and devoted from childhood to the tales of the supernatural so common in Romantic literature,



Rossetti had often treated occult themes in his painting and verse. Burne-Jones was quick to follow. His very first pen-and-ink drawing, *The Waxen Image* of 1856 (present whereabouts unknown), illustrated a poem of his master's about witchcraft, "Sister Helen"; and witches continued to fascinate him, Sidonia taking her place in a gallery that also included Nimuë (cat. nos. 15, 64), Circe, and Morgan le Fay (fig. 24, 55). Needless to say, these were no ordinary witches; they were enchantresses whose fatal power lay at least partly in their beauty, and this invokes another aspect of Meinhold's influence, his impact on the circle's cult of the beautiful woman or, in Pre-Raphaelite slang, the "stunner." Here indeed was the writer's true significance so far as these devotees were concerned. By adding a dimension of menace to their worship of female beauty, his book proved a potent source for depictions of the femme fatale, a concept that looms so large in later Pre-Raphaelite and Symbolist imagery.

Meinhold's influence had a visual counterpart in the debt that Rossetti and his associates owed at this period to early German engravers, a debt revealed particularly clearly in the Düreresque qualities of Burne-Jones's pen-and-ink drawings. In fact, Burne-Jones's image of Sidonia is partly based on a likeness of the witch by a follower of Lucas Cranach (1472–1553) that Meinhold claimed to have seen "at Stargord, near Regenwalde, in the castle of the Count von Bork." Like the "Cranach," Burne-Jones's picture shows Sidonia "in the prime of mature beauty," with "a gold net drawn over her almost golden yellow hair," and carrying "a pompadour of brown leather." As for her highly distinctive dress, it seems to owe something to a terrifying figure that Meinhold describes as having been "added, after a lapse of many years, to the youthful portrait. . . . The sorceress is

arrayed in her death garments—white with black stripes."⁸

This feeling for Dürer and his contemporaries was part of the circle's general medievalism, and Burne-Jones's two paintings betray another aspect of this, his involvement with the rich, somber decorative schemes that characterized the Gothic Revival in his High Victorian phase. There are hints in the backgrounds of stained-glass windows such as he was designing for Powell's and would soon design for Morris, as well as in massive pieces of furniture of the type he was decorating for Morris, Seddon, and Burges. The pictures' color harmonies—reddish browns and blacks set off against passages of dull white, acid yellow, deep blue, and green—are precisely those of the ecclesiastical and domestic interiors to which he was contributing during these early years.

At the same time, the pictures reflect the taste for the sixteenth century that was gradually modifying and even succeeding medievalism. There was a sudden interest in Renaissance crimes, probably largely due to Swinburne, whose devotion to Meinhold, like his better-known passion for the more gory products of the Elizabethan dramatists, sprang from his preoccupation with sadomasochism and the connection between love and pain. It is no accident that Burne-Jones's von Bork pictures were painted at a moment when his relations with Swinburne were particularly close. "He had rooms very near us," Georgie recalled on the very page of the *Memorials* on which she mentions the pictures' frames, "and we saw a great deal of him; sometimes twice or three times in a day he would come in, bringing his poems hot from his heart and certain of welcome and a hearing at any hour."⁹ The two men must often have discussed Swinburne's verse play *The Queen Mother*, about Catherine de' Medici and the massacre of Saint Bartholomew, which was published in 1860; his plans for another drama, *Chastelard* (1865), about a young courtier in love with Mary, Queen of Scots, who is executed after being discovered in her bedroom; or again, the prose and verse he aimed to write about his "blessedest pet" Lucretia Borgia, in whose "holy family" he had taken "the deepest and most reverential interest" since childhood.¹⁰ One of these pieces was "A Ballad of Life," the opening poem in his *Poems and Ballads*, which was dedicated to Burne-Jones in 1866 and contains many parallels with his work. But the clearest evidence of a shared interest lies in Swinburne's article "Notes on Designs of the Old Masters at Florence," published in the *Fortnightly Review* in 1868, in which the writer describes his friend's picture of Sidonia as a "nobler" study of a witch than one by Filippino Lippi (1457–1504) that had already won his admiration.

Rossetti himself never illustrated Meinhold, but he did paint Borgia subjects, and *Lucretia Borgia* (Tate Gallery, London), a watercolor of 1860–61, is closely related to Burne-Jones's *Sidonia* in both thematic (Lucretia is seen washing her hands after administering poison to her husband) and compositional terms.¹¹ In fact they are effectively twin, contemporary expressions of the same idea. Rossetti's attraction to the Borgia story even overcame his indifference to music, and he became a



Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828–1882), *Lucretia Borgia*, 1860–61, reworked 1869. Watercolor, 17 x 9¾ in. (43.2 x 24.7 cm). Photograph taken before retouching. Tate Gallery, London



Giulio Romano (ca. 1499–1546), *Isabella d'Este*, ca. 1520. Oil on panel, 44½ x 35 in. (113 x 89 cm). Hampton Court Palace

fan of Donizetti's opera *Lucrezia Borgia*, which was often performed at Covent Garden at this period, with Giulia Grisi and Giuseppe Mario in the leading roles. He urged his friends to see it too, and Burne-Jones, who was much more interested in music than his master, may well have done so.

Just as the taste for German engravings belonged to a wider medievalism, so the interest in Renaissance subjects was an integral part of the more sensuous style, heavily indebted to Venetian sixteenth-century painting, that emerged in Rossetti's circle in the late 1850s. As already noted, this phenomenon had much to do with the advent of Fanny Cornforth as Rossetti's model and mistress. Her florid good looks and thick blond hair made her the natural muse of the new idiom, and it is remarkable how her physical type corresponded to that of the heroines who were then in vogue. The set was well aware of the lock of Lucretia Borgia's golden hair that is preserved, together with her letters to Cardinal Bembo, in the Ambrosiana Library in Milan; and *Sidonia*, as we have seen, had "golden yellow hair," in the "Cranach" portrait so vividly described by Meinhold. In fact, Fanny may well have been the model for Burne-Jones's *Sidonia von Bork*. Although she is best known for her frequent appearances in Rossetti's paintings, she is recorded sitting to Burne-Jones in January 1858,¹² and her features may be traced in several of his early works (see also cat. nos. 15, 19).

The dependence of the new style on Venetian painting also finds an echo in *Sidonia von Bork*. Visiting the Pitti in Florence

in September 1859, Burne-Jones had made a sketch of Titian's *La Bella* (1536),¹³ and for *Sidonia* he had a source in mind which, if not actually Venetian, is comparable to Titian's famous portrait and other works of this type that the artists were studying. According to Edward Clifford, Burne-Jones's follower and faithful copyist and at one time the owner of the second version of *Sidonia*, the witch's dress, with its fantastic serpentine pattern, was "suggested by a picture at Hampton Court."¹⁴ Situated within easy reach of London, the great Tudor palace was a favorite haunt of the circle at this date. There are other accounts of their studying the pictures which, significantly, include many Venetian works. But the picture that arrested Burne-Jones's attention was the portrait of Isabella d'Este, then attributed to Parmigianino (1503–1540) but now given to his contemporary Giulio Romano. It clearly "suggested" not only the design of *Sidonia*'s dress but the motif of figures entering and leaving the room in the watercolor's upper right corner, while it probably contributed to its general spirit, being itself a curiously sinister and menacing image.

Even the portrait's surroundings were probably influential. The artists were constantly on the lookout for appropriate settings for their pictures. Rossetti had fallen for another Tudor mansion, Haddon Hall in Derbyshire, in 1857, and in 1860 he considered renting a château near Boulogne which he thought would provide "very paying backgrounds."¹⁵ Hampton Court must have had a similar appeal, with its narrow corridors and airless closets, not to mention their outdoor extension, the famous maze, in which Rossetti, Burne-Jones, and their wives got "lost" during a visit to the palace in October 1860.¹⁶ For anyone dealing imaginatively with the subject of Renaissance crimes, here was an authentic and highly evocative *mise-en-scène*.

[JC]

1. *Memorials*, vol. 1, p. 215.
2. See *Paintings from the Leathart Collection* (exh. cat., Newcastle upon Tyne: Laing Art Gallery, 1968).
3. William Michael Rossetti, *Dante Gabriel Rossetti: His Family Letters, with a Memoir* (London, 1895), vol. 1, p. 101.
4. Rossetti, *Letters*, vol. 1 (1965), p. 224.
5. *Pall Mall Gazette*, January 26, 1886, p. 2.
6. Quoted in J. Saxon Mills, *Sir Edward Cook* (London, 1921), p. 282n.
7. Virginia Surtees, ed., *Sublime and Instructive: Letters from John Ruskin to Louisa, Marchioness of Waterford, Anna Blunden and Ellen Heaton* (London, 1972), p. 251.
8. William Meinhold, *Sidonia the Sorceress*, translated by Lady Wilde, 3d ed. (London, 1926). pp. vi–vii.
9. *Memorials*, vol. 1, p. 215.
10. Cecil Y. Lang, ed., *The Swinburne Letters* (London, 1959–62), vol. 6, p. 164.
11. The connection is more obvious in the photograph of the picture as originally painted than in the work itself, which was extensively retouched in 1869; see H. C. Marillier, *Dante Gabriel Rossetti* (London, 1926), pp. vi–vii.
12. Ford M. Hueffer, *Ford Madox Brown* (London, 1896), p. 154.
13. Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge.
14. [Edward Clifford], *Broadlands As It Was* (London, 1890), p. 55.
15. Rossetti, *Letters*, vol. 1 (1965), p. 367.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 381.



13.

Clara von Bork

1860

Watercolor and gouache, 13³/₈ x 7¹/₈ in.
(34 x 18 cm)

Signed and dated on a cartouche lower
left: E. Jones pinxit 1860

The original oak mount inscribed
below: Clara von Bork 1560

PROVENANCE: See cat. no. 12

EXHIBITED: New Gallery 1892–93,
no. 8; New Gallery 1898–99, no. 22;
Tate Gallery 1933, no. 38; Arts Council
1975–76, no. 25

Tate Gallery, London. Bequeathed by
W. Graham Robertson, 1948 (NO5878)

A pair to *Sidonia von Bork* (cat. no. 12), the pendant picture shows the gentle Clara von Dewitz, who serves as a foil to Sidonia in Meinhold's romance. Married to Marcus Bork, Sidonia's virtuous cousin, she protects the witch when she gets into trouble as a result of her heinous crimes, only to be repaid with a hideous fate: Sidonia gives her a philter to induce the appearance of death, and she is entombed alive. Wearing her "citron" dress, Clara holds a clutch of fledgling doves to symbolize her innocence, while a black cat, Sidonia's familiar, looks up at them with predatory longing. If the worldly Fanny Cornforth seems to be the model for Sidonia, it would appear that Clara is a likeness of Georgiana Macdonald, the high-minded daughter of a Methodist minister whom Burne-Jones married in June 1860, about the time the two pictures were painted.

It is worth noting that while *Sidonia* is signed "E. Burne Jones," *Clara* is signed simply "E. Jones." The artist was beginning to use the double-barreled name, but it was not yet invariable practice and the hyphen was still lacking.

[JC]

Childe Roland

1861

Pen and ink with wash, 17 x 9½ in. (43 x 24 cm)

Signed: EBJ 1861; and on scroll: CHILDE ROLAND TO THE DARK TOWER CAME

PROVENANCE: John Ruskin; F. S. Ellis; Arthur West; purchased, 1983

EXHIBITED: Arts Council 1975–76, no. 22

Trustees of the Cecil Higgins Art Gallery, Bedford (P727)

NEW YORK AND PARIS

The last in the artist's sequence of elaborate pen-and-ink drawings, *Childe Roland* depicts the hero of a poem by Robert Browning (1812–1889), "Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came," published in *Men and Women* in 1855. Browning was popular with the Pre-Raphaelite circle, and Burne-Jones was introduced to him by Rossetti in 1856. Burne-Jones regarded Browning as "the deepest and intensest of all the poets,"¹ and Rossetti reported to the poet himself in 1856 that "Childe Roland" was read to the pupils at the Working Men's College (where Ruskin, Rossetti, and Burne-Jones all taught) on the grounds that "it would do them good, whether they understood it all at first hearing or not."²

The drawing is not so much an illustration of the verse as a character study of the introspective knight, who in the last line of the poem comes to the enigmatic dark tower, announcing his arrival by blowing on the horn at the gate. His somber armor—an exercise in burnished metal that would be refined in the Saint George and the Dragon series (cat. nos. 31, 33, 34) and *Chant d'Amour* (cat. nos. 30, 84)—matches the dark mood of the poem, surprisingly and effectively relieved in Burne-Jones's image by a riotous host of sunflowers, which were doubtless familiar to him from the garden of Red House. Many years later he enthused to Frances Horner over the seductive characteristics of the plant: "Do you know sunflowers? How they peep at you and look brazen sometimes and proud—and others look shy and some so modest that up go their hands to hide their brown blushes . . . and do you know their backs?—the busiest back of any live creatures. I could draw them for ever, and should love to sit for days drawing them. . . . It is so right to make them talk mottoes; they all look as if they were thinking."³

Burne-Jones himself recorded that the drawing belonged to Ruskin, and it may have been a commission. It has been surmised that it was one

of the many works lent by Ruskin to Winnington Hall, the girls' school in Cheshire whose work he patronized in the late 1850s, and that he may have lost claim to it when the school's headmistress, Miss Bell, went bankrupt in 1873.⁴ It later passed into the collection of the bookseller and publisher F. S. Ellis, who issued Morris's *Earthly Paradise* (1868–70) and later edited the Kelmscott *Chaucer* (cat. no. 154).

1. *Memorials*, vol. 1, p. 153.

2. Letter to Robert Browning, February 6, 1856, in Rossetti, *Letters*, vol. 1 (1965), p. 286.

3. Horner 1933, p. 119.

4. Christian 1984a, p. 124.



Merlin and Nimuë

1861

Watercolor and bodycolor, 25¼ x 20 in. (64.1 x 52.1 cm)

Signed: EBJ 1861; on the back of the original frame, in the artist's handwriting: E Burne-Jones *The enchantment of Nimue: how by subtilty she caused Merlin to pass under a heavy stone into a grave*

PROVENANCE: James Leathart; purchased from Goupil Gallery, 1896

EXHIBITED: Old Water-Colour Society, London, 1865, no. 230; New Gallery 1892–93, no. 2; A Pre-Raphaelite Collection [James Leathart], Goupil Gallery, London, 1896, no. 7; Arts Council 1975–76, no. 27

Victoria and Albert Museum, London (257–1896)

The serious revival of interest in the ancient Arthurian legends among the second-generation Pre-Raphaelites can be traced to Burne-Jones's famous discovery of Robert Southey's 1817 edition of Thomas Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur*

in a Birmingham bookshop in 1855. "I remember I could not buy the precious book," he confided in 1880. "I used to read it in a bookseller's shop day after day, and bought cheap books to pacify the owner, but Morris got it at once and we feasted on it long."¹ "With Edward it became literally a part of himself," Georgiana later recalled. "Its strength and beauty, its mystical religion and noble chivalry of action, the world of lost history and romance in the names of people and places—it was his own birthright upon which he entered."²

Burne-Jones's first opportunity to paint an Arthurian subject was provided by the 1857 campaign of mural painting in the old Debating Hall (now the Library) of the Oxford Union Society. He chose Merlin and Nimuë, opposing two hieratic figures within a mysterious landscape, in a bold composition which struck Rossetti as "a perfect masterpiece."³

With the appropriate text prominently displayed on the inner frame, this subsequent watercolor of the same subject is an important avowal of the artist's delight in the simple intensity of the medieval story. His passion for Malory's original had

encouraged him to challenge Tennyson, in an encounter at Little Holland House in 1858, over the poet's treatment of Nimuë in his forthcoming *Idylls of the King* (1859). Burne-Jones was pained "when he found the poet in his Idyll had modernized and altered the character while preserving the ancient name," and was relieved when Tennyson "good-naturedly" agreed to change it to Vivien.⁴

A Lady of the Lake who had been introduced to Camelot by King Pellinore, Nimuë proved fatally attractive to Merlin. The passage from Malory cited by Burne-Jones describes how she effected her escape from his advances, luring Merlin to his doom under an enchanted stone which he had revealed to her, so that "he came never out for all the craft that he could do." In this strikingly simple composition, Merlin seems physically to shrink in scale beside the imperious figure of his nemesis (painted from Rossetti's then-favorite model, Fanny Cornforth), now armed with the magician's book of spells. Reviewing Burne-Jones's retrospective exhibition at the New Gallery in the winter of 1892–93, F. G. Stephens remarked that "the



poetry of the drawing is most clearly manifest in the background, a weird landscape closed by gloomy purple hills, . . . while evening shadows creep towards us over the vale and magic lake at its foot."⁵ Merlin's little black dog tugs vainly at his master's sleeve, emphasizing his powerlessness—a note of darkly comic humor of a kind also found in Morris, Marshall, Faulkner & Co.'s series of stained-glass windows illustrating the story of Tristram and Iseult (Bradford Art Galleries and Museums), to which Burne-Jones contributed four subjects in 1861–62.

1. *Memorials*, vol. 1, p. 117.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 116.

3. Letter to Charles Eliot Norton, July 1858, in which Rossetti describes the subject as "Merlin being imprisoned beneath a stone by the Damsel of the Lake"; Rossetti, *Letters*, vol. 1 (1965), p. 337. The mural is reproduced in William Holman Hunt, *Oxford Union Society: The Story of the Painting of the Pictures on the Walls and the Decorations on the Ceiling of the Old Dining Hall (Now the Library) in the Years 1857–8–9* (Oxford, 1906); see also Christian 1981b, pp. 38–40.

4. *Memorials*, vol. 1, p. 182.

5. *Athenaeum*, January 14, 1893, p. 58.

16.

The Backgammon Players

1861

Pencil heightened with bodycolor, 23 $\frac{3}{8}$ x 40 $\frac{1}{2}$ in. (60 x 103 cm)

Signed: EBJ 1861

PROVENANCE: Bought by James Anderson Rose, 1861; Charles Fairfax Murray; Charles Ricketts and Charles Haslewood Shannon; bequeathed by Shannon, 1937

EXHIBITED: Arts Council 1975–76, no. 31; Fitzwilliam Museum 1980, no. 18; Musée des Beaux-Arts de Nantes 1992, no. 8

Lent by the Syndics of the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge (2004)



17.

The Backgammon Players

1861–62

Watercolor and bodycolor on paper, laid down on canvas, 8 $\frac{1}{4}$ x 13 $\frac{7}{8}$ in.

(22 x 35 cm)

Signed on back of frame: E. Burne Jones, 62 Gt. Russell St., Bloomsbury

PROVENANCE: William Holman Hunt; Sir John Holder; presented in his memory by Lady Holder, 1923

EXHIBITED: New Water-Colour Society, London, winter 1862; "Cotton Famine Relief Exhibition," Society of British Artists, London, January 1863; New Gallery 1898–99, no. 5; Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna 1986, no. 2

Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery (1923P146)

The Fitzwilliam drawing (cat. no. 16) is the earliest of Burne-Jones's remarkable exercises in draftsmanship in pencil on a large scale. The medium offered a greater tonal contrast than was possible in the pen-and-ink drawings of 1858–59, and allowed even more delicate detail, as exemplified in the singing bird on the extreme left and the fragile plants in the foreground. The more vigorous foliage, including sunflower and poppies, is carried over from the stylized background to the ink drawing of *Childe Roland* (cat. no. 14). The female figure has previously been identified as Jane Morris, but seems more likely to be modeled from Fanny Cornforth, of whom there is a pencil drawing ascribed to this date in which she is wearing an identical flowing dress.¹ The mood of the subject has been compared with the relaxed atmosphere of the Morris' social life at Red House, described by Georgiana Burne-Jones as "more a poem than a house," with an exterior porch and rose trellis where guests would sit and talk.²



17

Converted to watercolor, the image has a corresponding airiness that balances the dark, suffused colors and stiff, dry brushwork which recalls the technique of the artist's first mentor, Rossetti. It forms part of a group of small early watercolors in this style, including *The Goldfish Pool* (1861–62; Carlisle Art Gallery) and *An Idyll* (1862; Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery), both of which found ready buyers among Burne-Jones's circle of friends. Shown at the winter exhibition of the New Water-Colour Society, *The Backgammon Players* received a notice in the *Athenaeum*, where it was described as a "sketch for a larger picture, representing a lady and a knight in Venetian costume, playing at backgammon in a garden pleasaunce. . . . A poetic richness of tone and sentiment mark this picture."³ It was then donated by the artist to a bazaar sale for the relief of Lancashire weavers during the cotton famine of 1862–63, occasioned by the blockade of the South during the American Civil War.⁴ It was said to have been "later discovered in a shop by Mr. Holman Hunt, who bought it for a few pounds,"⁵ but no other documentation is known before its appearance in the collection of the Birmingham brewer and collector Sir John Holder.

The large drawing was acquired in 1861 by James Anderson Rose, a solicitor who acted for Rossetti and who was also a collector; his taste for such presentation works led him to become the most important early patron of Frederick Sandys.

1. Christie's, June 9, 1995, lot 270, illus.
2. *Memorials*, vol. 1, p. 212.
3. *Athenaeum*, December 27, 1862, p. 850.
4. In a letter probably of November 1862, Ruskin tried to persuade Ellen Heaton, already a patron of Rossetti and Arthur Hughes, to buy the work: "Jones is just finishing a picture of two people playing at chess in a garden—I think it will be pretty. He wants to send its price to Manchester starving people, has done it for that" (Virginia Surtees, ed., *Sublime and Instructive: Letters from John Ruskin to Louisa, Marchioness of Waterford, Anna Blunden, and Ellen Heaton* [London, 1972], p. 245).
5. De Lisle 1904, p. 62.

18.

The Backgammon Players Cabinet

1862

Painted wood (pine), the doors with oil paint on leather, 73 x 45½ x 21½ in. (185.5 x 114.5 x 53.5 cm); executed by Morris, Marshall, Faulkner & Co.

PROVENANCE: Lord Taunton

EXHIBITED: International Exhibition, South Kensington, 1862; Delaware Art Museum 1976, no. 4–46

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Rogers Fund, 1926 (26.54)
NEW YORK ONLY

From November 1856 to September 1858 Burne-Jones and William Morris shared rooms in London at 17 Red Lion Square. "Topsy [Morris's nickname] has had some furniture (chairs and table) made after his own design; they are as beautiful as mediaeval work, and when we have painted designs of knights and ladies upon them they will be perfect marvels."¹ Nothing of this date ascribable to Burne-Jones has survived. The first significant piece of furniture known to have been decorated by him is a large wardrobe painted with scenes from Chaucer's "Prioress's Tale" (see cat. no. 43), which was given as a wedding present to the Morrises and installed in Jane's bedroom at Red House.² Shortly before his own marriage in June 1860, Burne-Jones decorated a plain sideboard with scenes of medieval ladies feeding parrots, pigs, and fish—the Ladies and Animals cabinet, now in the Victoria and Albert Museum³—and followed that with the painting of an upright piano.

It was natural that painted furniture would form an important part of the early work of Morris, Marshall, Faulkner & Co., founded in April 1861, and a major early commission came from J. P. Seddon (1827–1906) for the decorative panels on a drawings cabinet the architect had designed for his own use.⁴ Bearing designs by Ford Madox Brown, Rossetti, and Burne-Jones illustrating the pleasures of King René of Anjou, it was one of the main exhibits in the Medieval Court at the International Exhibition of 1862, held in South Kensington. The firm displayed two other cabinets, one painted by Morris with scenes from the legend of Saint George, and this upright example, bearing a version of the *Backgammon Players* watercolor.⁵ The constructional design of both can be attributed to the architect Philip Webb, who may also have been responsible for the decorative patternwork, although an entry in Burne-Jones's account book with the firm dating from January to April 1862, which probably applies to the Backgammon Players cabinet, may suggest that he executed some of the more elaborate designs: "Gold cabinet: woodwork £5 painting £10."⁶

Painted furniture was a striking feature of the 1862 Medieval Court, which also included four important items designed by William Burges and a carved and painted bookcase by Richard Norman Shaw.⁷ Despite recognizing its purpose as a complement to Pugin's original at the Great Exhibition of 1851, critics were divided between those who abhorred the idea of a Medieval Court at a modern industrial exhibition and others who appreciated the quality of workmanship shown by

adherents to the Gothic Revival, which at that time paradoxically represented the avant-garde in British design. Thus, while the art critic of *London Society* could only wonder, "As we strolled into the court devoted to the exhibition of Messrs Morris & Co's mediaeval furniture, tapestries, &c., who could have believed that it represented manufactures of the 19th century?" the *Parthenon* welcomed a "return to the severer forms and manly thought of an earlier time."⁸ The exhibition offered mixed fortunes to Morris: although the firm was awarded a prize medal, and most of the exhibits sold—the Backgammon Players Cabinet, priced at 30 guineas, seems to have found a buyer—he realized that this kind of modern medievalism, which to another commentator showed how "Pre-Raphaelitism has descended from art to manufacture,"⁹ was something of a dead end for the firm, whose future lay in the development of workshop-



oriented production of stained glass, wallpaper, and textiles.

1. *Memorials*, vol. 1, p. 147.
2. Ashmolean Museum, Oxford; reproduced in Victoria and Albert Museum 1996, p. 157.
3. *Ibid.*, no. J.7.
4. Also in the Victoria and Albert Museum (*ibid.*, no. J.13); its history and decoration are described in a booklet, *King René's Honeymoon Cabinet*, published by Seddon in 1898.
5. For the Saint George Cabinet, again in the Victoria and Albert Museum, see Victoria and Albert Museum 1996, no. J.18.
6. Account book with Morris & Company, Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge (transcript in the Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery). Sewter (1974–75, vol. 2, p. 102) assumes that this reference is to be read with the next entry, “3 Panels for Seddon £9.10.0,” but the prices are inappropriate, and Seddon’s huge oak cabinet could hardly be called “gold.”
7. Burges’s furniture (and his patronage of the young Burne-Jones) is fully described in J. Mordaunt Crook, *William Burges and the High Victorian Dream* (London, 1981). For the Medieval Court, see Stephen Wildman, “The International Exhibition of 1862,” in Whitworth Art Gallery 1984, pp. 124–47.
8. *London Society* 2 (1862), p. 106; *Parthenon*, October 4, 1862, p. 724.
9. *Cassell's Illustrated Exhibitor* (London, 1862), p. 53.

19.

Hope

ca. 1862

Oil on canvas, 19½ x 15 in. (49.5 x 38 cm)

PROVENANCE: Christie's, June 21, 1985, lot 83

Collection Mr. and Mrs. Edward Kosinski



19

Burne-Jones's first attempt at painting in oils may have been as early as 1857, when he was noted by Rossetti to have chosen the subject of *The Blessed Damozel* in response to “an order for an oil picture from Mr. Plint of Leeds.”¹ Originally conceived as a diptych, it was possibly laid aside in favor of work on the Oxford Union mural project in that year: an unfinished oil on panel survives (private collection),² and a single-figure subject was later taken up and completed as a watercolor in 1860 (Fogg Art Museum, Cambridge, Mass.).

The commission for the Adoration triptych at Brighton (cat. no. 10) seems to have encouraged a few additional small female figure subjects, including a study of Georgiana against a background of roses (1862; known as *The Rose Bower*³) and the present picture. This has been identified as *Hope* from its similarity to a watercolor (1862; private collection) that shows the

young woman holding a ball inscribed with the medieval proverb “If hope were not, heart should break.”⁴ Although only lightly sketched, the dress has a distinctly Venetian shape, suggesting both the artist’s awareness of Renaissance portraiture and a possible influence of the idiosyncratic half-length oils by Rossetti, such as *Bocca Baciata* (fig. 62). It may well be the same model, Fanny Cornforth, who was sitting to Burne-Jones by 1858, and who appears as the femme fatale in *Merlin and Nimue* (cat. no. 15).

1. Dante Gabriel Rossetti to William Bell Scott, June 1857; see Rossetti, *Letters*, vol. 1 (1965), p. 325.
2. Arts Council 1975–76, no. 23; sold at Sotheby’s, June 19, 1984, lot 27. The Fogg watercolor is illustrated in Harrison and Waters 1973, pl. 45.
3. Sotheby’s Belgravia, June 20, 1972, lot 109 (28 x 21 in., with arched top); subsequently with the Maas Gallery, London.
4. New Gallery 1892–93, no. 4; 1898–99, no. 28; and Arts Council 1975–76, no. 35 (now identified as a watercolor copy by Edward Clifford).

Ruskin and Italy

There was undoubtedly a self-indulgent, tongue-in-cheek aspect to the circle's medievalism. Tennyson was making Arthurian subject matter more familiar, but Malory was still something of an exclusive cult, and Meinhold even more so. Rossetti actually said that he introduced some of his quaintest effects "to puzzle fools,"¹ and there are passages in *Buondelmonte's Wedding* (cat. no. 7) so eccentric they remind one of the parodies of the Pre-Raphaelite style that George du Maurier contributed to *Punch* in 1866.

All this may have been innocent enough, a natural expression of youthful joie de vivre and a desire to shock the philistine, but not everyone saw it in this light. Ruskin for one was deeply unhappy, feeling that the artists were falling short of the high ideals he had enunciated in *Modern Painters* and which he believed the Pre-Raphaelites had achieved in their finest works. He had argued that "choice of noble subject" was an essential prerequisite of great art, placing sacred themes in the highest category, followed by "the acts or meditations of great men."² Hence his warm approval of Holman Hunt's *Light of the World* (fig. 46) and the religious or Dantesque subjects that Rossetti had favored in his early watercolors (fig. 49). He had also developed the concept of the "ideal grotesque," an imaginative composition so treated that it had profound moral significance. Art for Ruskin was always open to allegorical or symbolic interpretation, and he had written of "grotesque idealism" that "no element of imagination has a wider range, a more magnificent use, or so colossal a grasp of sacred truth." To this genre belonged not only some of his favorite works by the Old Masters but certain paintings by Turner, Rossetti, and G. F. Watts, in which he discerned "the dawn of a new era of art."³

It is hardly surprising that Ruskin, thinking in such elevated, absolute terms, was alarmed by the medievalists' excesses. "Puzzling fools" with quirky details was a far cry from seeking to reveal the full moral significance of a subject through meaningful symbolism. Nor could he see much merit in the *Morte d'Arthur*, about which, he complained to Norton, "Rossetti and the PRB are all gone crazy."⁴ Brought up as a strict evangelical, he was convinced that "all *progressive* art

hitherto has been religious art," and that "periods of decline" in painting were "accurately marked . . . by its employment on mythology or profane history instead of sacred history."⁵ He was also opposed to artists' painting scenes of violence and sensuality, two qualities in which Malory abounds. He believed not only that such subjects corrupted by appealing to man's morbid love of the sensational but, more fundamentally, that they were incompatible with the image of man he had evoked in his analysis of what he termed Vital Beauty, displaying a prelapsarian serenity expressive of his true spiritual nature. Here again, his argument was deeply rooted in his religious beliefs; man, he reasoned, was beautiful because he was serene, serene because he was happy, and happy when he was virtuous, living in accordance with the law of God and witness to his glory.

Ruskin was equally disturbed by the formal qualities of the circle's work. Mannered, cerebral, and inward-looking, it seemed to have lost all contact with nature, the ultimate source of beauty and truth. Hence his irritable proviso when offering to pay Rossetti to paint a second mural in the Oxford Union that he would do so only as long as there was "no absolute nonsense in it, and the trees are like trees, and the stones like stones."⁶ Equally disconcerting was the painters' fondness for busy detail, crowded compositions, and garish heraldic patterns. "Clever but not right" was his assessment of Morris's design for the Union roof, a riot of birds and animals inspired by medieval illumination.⁷ More revealing still were his comments on Rossetti's watercolor *Before the Battle* (fig. 57). This "Froissartian" composition, so similar in many respects to Burne-Jones's pen-and-ink drawing *Going to the Battle* (cat. no. 6), had been started for Charles Eliot Norton in 1857. When Ruskin saw it two years later, he told Norton that he thought it "almost the worst thing" the artist had ever painted, and likely to "put an end to all chance of R's reputation ever beginning in America." Even after making Rossetti retouch it, he found it "still painfully quaint and hard," with a "mode of colour-treatment . . . too much like that of the Knave of Hearts."⁸ Where in this welter of self-indulgence were the stylistic values he had consistently advocated, the need to "seek for and dwell upon the fairest forms," harmonize



Figure 57. Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828–1882), *Before the Battle*, 1857–62. Watercolor, 16 $\frac{3}{8}$ x 11 in. (42.3 x 28 cm). Museum of Fine Arts, Boston

“truths,” and exercise “a quality of grasp” analogous to “the power of . . . a great poet over his conception”?⁹ Above all, where was that sense of peace and order that he never ceased to yearn for in nature and art, the quality he had identified as “repose,” writing of it that “no work of art can be great without it, and . . . all art is great in proportion to the appearance of it. It is the most unfailing test of beauty”?¹⁰ Just as the content of the medieval style violated the principles of Vital Beauty, so its formal expression offended against the complementary theory of Typical Beauty, in which he attempted to establish canons of beauty in terms of perceived aspects of the nature of God. “Repose” is identified as the Type of Divine Permanence, “the especial and separating characteristic of the eternal mind and power, . . . the ‘I am’ of the Creator opposed to the ‘I become’ of all creatures.”¹¹ In fact, the more Ruskin warms to his subject the clearer it becomes that we are dealing with two closely associated sets of values, the concept of “repose” overlapping with that of man as a vehicle of Vital Beauty—serene, dignified and blissfully immune to passion. Pursuing his definition of “repose,” he writes: “Everything of

evil is betrayed and winnowed away by it, glitter and confusion, and glare of colour, . . . forced expression, evil choice of subject, over accumulation of materials, . . . over decoration, over division of parts.”¹² The passage takes us to the heart of why Ruskin distrusted Rossettian medievalism, for here were its sins in a nutshell.

Ruskin was not the only one to be worried. G. F. Watts, whose allegorical works he had praised as examples of “ideal grotesques,” was concerned about Rossetti’s influence on his pupil Val Prinsep. Watts also felt that Ruskin was partly to blame, presumably because of his eulogies of Gothic architecture and the freedom with which he had given the artists access to his collection of illuminated manuscripts and Dürer prints. In October 1858 Watts voiced his anxiety in a letter to Ruskin, and in his reply the critic assured him that he shared his unease at the turn of events. He admitted that he was “culpable,” deplored the way in which “Rossetti’s clique” had substituted “stiffness and quaintness and intensity” for “classical grace and tranquillity,” and added that he was “all the more sickened” in that he had recently been having “a great go with Paul Veronese.”¹³

This letter is of great interest to anyone studying Burne-Jones’s early development. The phrase “classical grace and tranquillity” is a reference to the ideal of “repose” and its associated vision of man as an embodiment of spiritual beauty. We tend to think of Ruskin as a “Goth,” but classical Greek sculpture played a crucial part in his critical system, serving as the definitive expression of “repose” (the Parthenon *Theseus* is the instance given in *Modern Painters*) and bequeathing this vital quality to those artists who, in his judgment, were heirs to the classical tradition—Giotto, Orcagna, and the great sixteenth-century Venetians. Indeed the Pre-Raphaelites themselves were in the same tradition, as he made clear in his introduction to the Arundel Society’s publication of Giotto’s frescoes in the Arena Chapel at Padua (1853): “The Giottesque movement in the fourteenth, and Pre-Raphaelite movement in the nineteenth centuries, are precisely similar in bearing and meaning; both being . . . literally links in one unbroken chain of feeling; for exactly as Niccola Pisano and Giotto were helped by the classical sculptures discovered in their time, the Pre-Raphaelites have been helped by the works of Niccola and Giotto at Pisa and Florence.”¹⁴ Here was a further bond between Ruskin and Watts, who saw himself as the modern representative of a similar tradition, basing his style on a passionate admiration for the Elgin Marbles and the deepest respect for Giotto and Titian.

As for Ruskin’s “great go with Paul Veronese,” this alludes to an event that had taken place that summer at Turin, when the contrast between a dismal religious service in a Waldensian chapel and the robust beauty of Veronese’s *Solomon and the*

Queen of Sheba (1582; Galleria Sabauda), glowing in the afternoon sunlight in the picture gallery, had finally led him to discard his inherited puritanism in favor of that well-worn Victorian concept, a “religion of humanity.” As we have seen in touching on questions of Typical and Vital Beauty, Ruskin’s religious views were always inseparable from his aesthetic perceptions, and the experience in Turin had profound repercussions in this area, causing him to declare that art should express “a good, stout, self-commanding, magnificent animality,” and that he found this quality preeminently in sixteenth-century Venetian painting. Plunging into a study of Titian and Veronese, who were to emerge as the heroes of the last volume of *Modern Painters* (1860), he declared that “Francia and Angelico, and all the purists” (that is to say, artists who had been the heroes of earlier volumes) were, “however beautiful, . . . poor weak creatures in comparison.”¹⁵ There was an obvious parallel between the old “purists” and the modern medievalists, and it was in this sense that Ruskin’s “great go” with Veronese had fueled his distaste for the antics of “Rossetti’s clique.”

Ruskin could never resist trying to influence artists when he saw room for improvement in their work, and it was therefore characteristic that he ended his letter to Watts by promising to have a “serious talk” with Prinsep. In fact, he was not to lavish his attention on this rather pedestrian young artist, nor indeed on Rossetti himself, who had suffered Ruskin’s fussy supervision since their meeting in 1854 and was increasingly resistant to his criticism. The full force of his attempt at reform was rather to be felt by Burne-Jones, and it was *his* career that now took on the character of a “serious talk” with Ruskin. Ruskin always brought to these tasks an evangelical sense of mission, a desire to “save” and redeem, and in this case there were further incentives of a semireligious nature, his own “culpability” introducing an element of atonement, while

the recent crisis in Turin lent him a convert’s zeal. To Ruskin, moreover, with his almost pathological need to instruct, Burne-Jones must have seemed a sort of ideal. He was eminently worth “saving,” for whatever Ruskin’s reservations about medievalism, he had the highest regard for the young man’s work. Burne-Jones also inspired great affection in his mentor, an important consideration since Ruskin’s interest in an artist was always partly a matter of personal feelings. Perhaps most alluring of all, Burne-Jones seemed eager to meet him halfway by making a hero of him and showing an understanding of the intellectual issues involved. Ruskin must have been well aware that Burne-Jones had taken up art in a spirit of devotional fervor inspired by none other than himself. He would also have known the two articles in the *Oxford and Cambridge Magazine* in which Burne-Jones had demonstrated his grasp of the principles of *Modern Painters*, an enthusiastic review of the third volume and a spirited reply to an attack on Ruskin that had been made by Lady Eastlake in the *Quarterly Review*.

Ruskin’s “talks” with artists tended to end in tears. This happened in one form or another with Millais, Rossetti, and John Brett, although not as disastrously as it did with W. J. Stillman, the American who was literally ruined as an artist by Ruskin’s overbearing interference. But the case of Burne-Jones was different. Almost alone among Ruskin’s protégés, he was genuinely helped to self-discovery by the well-intentioned but often tactless advice. There was, after all, no enormous gap between the “grace and sweetness” that Ruskin rightly discerned in Burne-Jones and the “classical grace and tranquillity” he wished to encourage. This success, together with Burne-Jones’s ability to cope with an often difficult situation, made the “talk” uniquely rewarding for Ruskin too. With no other major practicing artist did he enjoy such a fruitful relationship, on both aesthetic and personal levels.



Figure 58. Edward Burne-Jones, *Ladies and Death*, 1860. Pen and ink, 5 $\frac{5}{8}$ x 17 $\frac{3}{4}$ in. (14.4 x 45 cm). National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne



Figure 59. Edward Burne-Jones, *The Wedding Procession of Sir Degrevault*, 1860. Mural painting at Red House



Figure 60. Edward Burne-Jones. Study for *The Wedding Procession of Sir Degrevault*, 1860. Pen and ink, 8½ x 10½ in. (20.5 x 26.5 cm). Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge

The “talk” had in fact started before Ruskin wrote to Watts. We find Burne-Jones studying apple blossom in the way that Ruskin urged artists to do in his *Academy Notes* of 1858, and there is a significant glimpse of him visiting Ruskin in the basement of the National Gallery, where the critic was sorting drawings in the Turner bequest. Ruskin “pointed out special things” among these and some early Italian pictures which the Gallery had recently acquired, no doubt using both as texts for a sermon on visual and spiritual truth.¹⁶ Again, throughout this period Burne-Jones was often at Little Holland House, living there almost continuously in the summer of 1858. Ostensibly the stay was due to Mrs. Prinsep’s kindly concern for his health, but it seems likely that Ruskin and Watts were behind it too. “Burne-Jones,” wrote Holman Hunt in 1877, “. . . has grown out of Rossetti and Watts.”¹⁷ Watts was never quite the hero to Burne-Jones that Rossetti had been but he was something equally important, an avuncular figure, sixteen years his senior, to whom he knew he could turn for professional advice. All this would undoubtedly have been aimed at aligning his style with the sublime objectivity of the Elgin Marbles, of which Watts had casts in his studio. “It was Watts,” Burne-Jones wrote later, “. . . who compelled me to try and draw better,” and the phrase implies a whole range of priorities based on this great exemplar.¹⁸

The two chief pen-and-ink drawings of 1859 seem to show Burne-Jones responding to the Ruskin–Watts offensive. In *The Wise and Foolish Virgins* (cat. no. 8) he suddenly abandons

his medieval themes for a scriptural subject, treats it with a wealth of naturalistic detail, and even hints at a growing awareness of classical sculpture in the friezelike composition. *Buondelmonte’s Wedding* (cat. no. 7) was almost certainly commissioned by Ruskin, a sure sign that he was trying to exert influence. The subject, furthermore, is one that Watts had treated in an enormous canvas which must have been seen by Burne-Jones at Little Holland House since it never found a buyer.¹⁹ However, the way in which Burne-Jones interpreted the story can only have filled his mentors with dismay. It is probably no accident that the drawing never belonged to Ruskin; it was bought instead by the artist’s patron T. E. Plint.

Whatever the case, the two elders may well have felt that more positive “talking” was needed—nothing less than the experience of Italy itself. Burne-Jones paid his first visit in the autumn of 1859, accompanied, not surprisingly, by Val Prinsep. They were away six weeks, visiting Genoa, Pisa, Florence, Siena, Verona, Padua, and Venice, and throughout the journey Burne-Jones recorded pictures and frescoes in small pencil and water-color sketches.²⁰ Prinsep later recalled how, “Ruskin in hand, we sought out every cornice, design, or monument praised by him. We bowed before Tintoret and scoffed at Sansovino. A broken pediment was a thing of horror.”²¹ But Burne-Jones’s copies alone tell us whose ideas guided the travelers’ steps. Time after time we find him studying paintings which represented some aspect, thematic or formal, of the Ruskinian ideal.

Moreover, the influence of the journey is immediately apparent in the work he did on his return. *Ladies and Death*

(fig. 58), a pen-and-ink drawing of 1860, paraphrases one of the frescoes then attributed to Orcagna that he had seen in the Campo Santo at Pisa. For Ruskin these paintings were supreme examples of “ideal grotesques,” his slightly confusing phrase for imaginary conceptions replete with moral significance. They were also models of how such flights of fancy should be based on a thorough understanding of “facts,” and an illustration of the classical tradition, Orcagna being an artist who could “taste the finer characters of Greek art” and who would have “understood the Theseus in an instant.”²² *Childe Roland* (cat. no. 14), a pen drawing executed the following year, is open to similar interpretation. True, its link with Italy is more tenuous, but, like *Buondelmonte's Wedding*, it was probably commissioned by Ruskin. Evidence of close study of nature is provided by the luxuriant sunflowers, and the subject, given Ruskin's admiration for Browning, falls into the approved category of the “meditations of great men.”

But the outstanding example is the murals Burne-Jones painted at Red House in 1860 (figs. 59, 60), each based in composition on Giotto's frescoes in the Arena Chapel at Padua. He must have known these paintings for some years from the Arundel Society's woodcuts and Ruskin's descriptive notes, but it is no surprise that he only now made use of them in this way, probably after studying them in 1859 at Ruskin's instigation. They were, of course, religious images, supreme among “noble subjects.” As George Landow has observed, they epitomize “the kind of serene emotion” that Ruskin had seen as “the highest form of Vital Beauty in man,”²³ and as a natural corollary to this, they exemplify “repose” and “classical grace.” Ruskin describes the scene on which Burne-Jones was

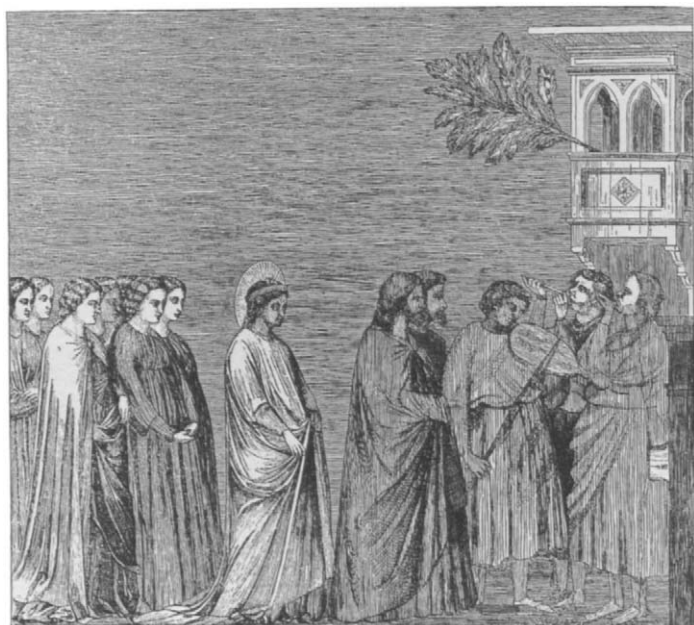


Figure 61. Wood engraving after Giotto, *The Virgin Returns to Her House*, Arena Chapel, Padua. Published by the Arundel Society, 1853–60

most dependent, that of the Virgin returning home after her betrothal (fig. 61), as typical of “the simplicity and repose which were peculiar to the compositions of the early fourteenth century,” and likens it to “a portion of the Elgin frieze.”²⁴ Finally, as we know, Ruskin regarded Giotto as a crucial link in the “unbroken chain” running from classical Greek sculpture to the Pre-Raphaelites. In other words, by encouraging Burne-Jones to look at these paintings, he was attempting to reestablish the tradition derailed by the medievalist heresy. Anything Watts was saying about *his* sense of belonging to a classical tradition would only have reinforced this message for Burne-Jones.

In fact, by about 1860 medievalism was on the wane throughout Burne-Jones's circle, to be replaced by a freer and more sensuous idiom with obvious references to Venetian painting. Nearly everyone was touched by this development in one form or another, not least Mrs. Cameron in some of her photographs. Its sources were complex. Ruskin's enthusiasm for the Venetians—inspired by his experience in Turin, confirmed by a tour of the German galleries in the winter of 1858–59, “trying to get at the mind of Titian,”²⁵ and finally unveiled in the last volume of *Modern Painters* (1860)—was clearly important. So was the strong Venetian element not only in Watts's paintings but (as he hinted in his portrait of Sara Prinsep entitled *In the Time of Giorgione*) in the atmosphere of indolent luxury cultivated at Little Holland House. Another vital, if unrelated, ingredient was the advent of Fanny Cornforth, the handsome, sexually generous young woman who was probably Rossetti's mistress even before his marriage in 1860, and was installed as his model and housekeeper when he moved to Cheyne Walk after Lizzie's death two years later. With her coarse good looks and golden hair, Fanny was the muse of Rossetti's Venetian period as completely as the virginal Lizzie had been that of his Dantesque phase. The key work here is his half-length portrait of her as *Bocca Baciata* (fig. 62), the “kissed mouth” of Boccaccio's poem, painted in 1859. Having, as he said, “a rather Venetian aspect”²⁶ and marking a dramatic return to his use of oils, the picture established at a stroke the format that was to become the staple of his later style. Ruskin—ironically enough since it was preeminently that of “magnificent animality”—deplored the new spirit which entered Rossetti's work under Fanny's influence. It completed his disenchantment with the artist's development; the two men, once so close, drifted apart, and Ruskin became even more dependent on Burne-Jones for affection and the chance to realize his preceptorial ambitions.

Several copies made by Burne-Jones in Italy in 1859, notably a sketch of Titian's *La Bella* (1536) in the Pitti, show him responsive to these new ideas, and they soon impinge on his original productions too. There is a Venetian quality about



Figure 62. Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828–1882), *Bocca Baciata*, 1859. Oil on panel, 13¼ x 12 in. (33.6 x 30.5 cm). Private collection

the female figures in the foreground of *Buondelmonte's Wedding* (cat. no. 7), a section of the drawing that was almost certainly finished *after* his return from Italy; and it emerges more strongly in the von Bork watercolors of the following year (cat. nos. 12, 13). He also made a number of essays in the half-length format of *Bocca Baciata* (cat. no. 19), as well as developing a distinct line in Giorgionesque idylls (cat. nos. 17, 30), the best known being the *Green Summer* of 1864 (fig. 63). There is even a painting heavily influenced by Carpaccio (cat. no. 27), an artist he had paid great attention to in 1859. More generally, the prevailing spirit found expression in his move to watercolor, his use of which stood in much the same relation to Venetian painting as his pen drawings did to Dürer's prints. Fanny sat to Burne-Jones as well as to Rossetti (cat. nos. 15, 19).

Burne-Jones's knowledge of Venetian art was expanded by another visit to Italy, made in the summer of 1862 with Georgie and Ruskin himself.²⁷ Although personal relations between Ruskin and Burne-Jones had never been closer, Ruskin was still not happy with his protégé's artistic progress. In November 1860 he was complaining to Norton that "Jones is always doing things which need one to get into a state of Dantesque visionariness before one can see them . . . it tires me so."²⁸ It may have been then that he resolved to take him to Italy himself, since the journey is said to have been "long



Figure 63. Edward Burne-Jones, *Green Summer*, 1864. Watercolor, 11⅜ x 19 in. (29 x 48.3 cm). Private collection

cherished.”²⁹ When it did eventually take place it had several objectives. Both the Burne-Joneses needed a rest (he had been seriously ill at Christmas, and their first child, Philip, had nearly died in April), while Ruskin was seeking self-imposed exile in a mood of melancholy and bitterness following the suppression of his essays on political economy, *Unto This Last*, which had caused an outcry when they were published in the *Cornhill Magazine* in the autumn of 1860. Burne-Jones was to make copies of pictures and frescoes that Ruskin thought were deteriorating, and in return Ruskin would pay all the expenses.

Leaving London on May 15, the travelers went via Paris and Basel to Milan, where they stayed a week before making a three-day excursion to Parma. Leaving Ruskin in Milan, the young couple then went on alone to Venice, seeing Verona and Padua en route. They remained in Venice for three weeks before returning to Milan, where they again left Ruskin when they finally set out for home on July 19.

The copies Burne-Jones made for Ruskin on this journey are larger and more finished than those executed for his own use in 1859, but although they were ostensibly art-historical records (comparable to those Ruskin made himself or later commissioned from Fairfax Murray and others), they were clearly selected with the copyist’s artistic welfare very much in mind. Most were taken from Venetian pictures, Titian’s early frescoes in Padua, the great works of Tintoretto and Veronese in the Ducal Palace, the Scuola di San Rocco, and Santa Maria della Salute in Venice; and by noting what Ruskin had said about the originals, often in the Venetian Index to *The Stones of Venice*, we can see that he was trying to drive home the old lessons once again. Tintoretto’s *Visitation* (figs. 64, 65) in San Rocco, for instance, was an illustration of both the classical tradition and an aspect of Vital Beauty, the “gestures” being “as simple and natural as Giotto’s, only expressed in grander lines,” while “the intervals between the figures look like ravines between great rocks, and have all the sublimity of an alpine valley at twilight.”³⁰ Similarly, a group of female guests in the same artist’s *Marriage at Cana* (1561) in the Salute was intended to be a model of the “grace” that constitutes Vital Beauty in Man, Ruskin having written lyrically of the “beautiful profiles and bendings of breasts and necks along the whole line.”³¹ In this case, Ruskin actually said that although he no longer wanted the copy, Burne-Jones should finish it, as it would be “best for [his] own work.”³²

But there is another, smaller group of copies, from a different type of painting. Made in Milan, they record works by Gaudenzio Ferrari and an artist whom Ruskin himself was copying there at this time, Bernardino Luini (cat. no. 20). By the early 1860s Ruskin’s ideas were moving away from Venetian “animality” to focus on an art of incandescent



Figure 64. Jacopo Tintoretto (1518–1594), *The Visitation*, ca. 1585. Oil on canvas, 63 x 94½ in. (160 x 240 cm). Scuola di San Rocco, Venice

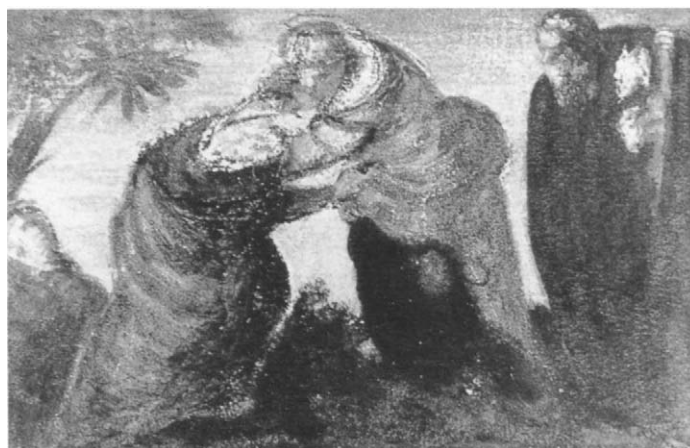


Figure 65. Edward Burne-Jones. Copy after Tintoretto, *The Visitation*, 1862. Watercolor, 3½ x 5½ in. (9 x 14 cm). The Ruskin Foundation (Ruskin Library), University of Lancaster

purity from which every distressing nuance had been purged. As we have seen, his romantic vision of the world as the outward expression of the nature of God had made him eagerly responsive to the qualities he had summed up as “repose,” and had given him, as he put it in 1854, “a great dread of subjects altogether painful.”³³ Indeed, purity in all its forms—not only a composition by Giotto but a snow-clad mountain, an alpine rose, or an innocent young girl—had always had an extraordinary hold over his imagination. Color symbolism was an integral part of this train of thought, light colors standing for purity and divine beneficence, while dark, murky ones were associated with evil and “foulness.” Much of the significance of the Arena Chapel frescoes for Ruskin lay in their clarity of tone.

Despite its theological basis, Ruskin’s ardent response to purity was not affected by his loss of faith in 1858. Intellectually this was possible because of the strong Aristotelian element in his theory of Vital Beauty, but the real



Figure 66. Edward Burne-Jones, *Saint Theophilus and the Angel*, 1863–67. Watercolor, 26 x 35 in. (66 x 89 cm)

reasons were emotional. His tortured relationship with Rose La Touche filled his mind with images of innocence, while his vivid awareness of social injustice made him bitterly resent an art which, by its “dramatic excitement,” added to the sum of human misery. In contrast, he developed the ideal of “constant” art, which, he wrote in 1867, “represents beautiful things, or creatures, for the sake of their own worthiness only; they are in perfect repose, and are there only to be looked at. They are doing nothing. It is what they are, not what they are doing, which is to interest you.”³⁴ Just as harmfully “dramatic” art was epitomized for him by the later works of Michelangelo and Raphael and the artists of the Baroque, so he associated “constant” art with Luini and Italian art generally of the period 1470–1520, identifying this as “simply the Age of the Masters,” who “desire only to make everything dainty, delightful and perfect.”³⁵ Neither mode, however, was locked into the past. “Dramatic” art had its modern representatives in Géricault and Gustave Doré, and “constant” art, too, was seeking a living exponent. Ruskin’s adoption of humanism, which lasted until 1875, when he regained a measure of Christian belief, meant that he no longer saw religious subjects as the height of perfection. But he did not lose faith in the “ideal grotesque,” especially when the concept was based on the classical myths, which he had come to regard as crucial sources of revealed truth. Throughout the 1860s he studied myths closely, and in his books of the period—*The Cestus of Aglaia* (1865–66), *The Queen of the Air* (1869), *Munera Pulveris* (1872), and others—they are constantly used to illuminate his meaning, often in painfully allusive trains of thought which stretch them to the very limits of meaning.

Needless to say, the artist to whom Ruskin looked to fulfill the “constant” program was Burne-Jones. We know they continued to “talk,” for during this intensely difficult period in his private life Ruskin sought the artist’s sympathetic company more than ever, coming to work in his studio, sitting to him for his portrait, opening his heart to him over Rose. There are hints of their conversations in letters. We find Ruskin urging Burne-Jones not to paint “melancholy subjects,”³⁶ and to lighten his palette “so as not to have any nasty black and brown things to make me look at when I come to ask what you’ve been about.”³⁷ Burne-Jones does not want Ruskin to know that he is painting the subject of Bluebeard’s wife, because “[he] will think that the skeletons are the principal features.”³⁸ There was a plan for the two men to return to Italy in 1864, this time visiting Florence, where they would no doubt have studied the “masters” of the period 1470–1520. The journey did not materialize because Ruskin’s father died that March, but this in itself gave Ruskin an added hold over Burne-Jones, bringing him a sizable fortune which enabled him to give the artist financial help.

Perhaps, in any case, Ruskin had done enough, for during the mid-1860s his “talk” with Burne-Jones bore fruit in a way that even he could approve. Burne-Jones’s work acquires an almost cloying sweetness. The sense of stillness so marked in his later work begins to make itself apparent, and there is a conscious emphasis on beauty, particularly in terms of facial expression and carefully designed drapery. His colors also lighten, the deep glowing tones he had favored hitherto, whether Gothic or Venetian in origin, giving way to bright pinks, blues, greens, and yellows (cat. nos. 30, 44).

Above all, he adopts a Ruskinian attitude to “drama.” It might be thought that he had never been a particularly “dramatic” artist, but powerful emotions and the forces of evil are represented in such works as *The Waxen Image*, *Sidonia von Bork* (cat. no. 12), and *Merlin and Nimuë* (cat. no. 15). Now even these were to be relinquished. Unfortunately, the key work in this context, *Saint Theophilus and the Angel* (fig. 66), a large watercolor exhibited at the Old Water-Colour Society in 1867, is now lost. The subject was the execution of Saint Dorothy and the appearance of an angel to Theophilus, a Roman notary who had jestingly told the saint before her martyrdom to send him roses from paradise. All the emphasis in the picture was on the angel’s arrival, while the execution was discreetly relegated to the middle distance. Ruskin must have watched the work’s progress anxiously, seeing it as potentially the perfect expression of his ideas. While the picture was on exhibition he gave a lecture at the British Institution entitled “On the Present State of Modern Art,” in which he used it as an example of all that a contemporary picture should be. Burne-Jones, he told his audience, had “the special gift . . . [of] seizing the good, and disdaining evil.” His work showed complete “sympathy for the repose of the Constant schools, . . . and in its purity and seeking for good and virtue as the life of all things and creatures, [it stands,] I think, unrivalled and alone.”³⁹

That Burne-Jones himself endorsed Ruskin’s program and made a conscious decision to adopt it we know from a passage in Georgie’s biography, in which she records a visit to Christie’s in 1894 to see the paintings illustrating the story of Saint George and the Dragon which he had executed for Birket Foster in 1865–67 (cat. nos. 31, 33, 34). “I was surprised,” she writes, “by their dramatic character, especially in the scenes where the King looks at the blood-stained clothes of the girls who have been devoured by the Dragon, and where the poor mothers crowd into the temple while the Princess draws the lot. I spoke of this to Edward afterwards, asking him whether he had not purposely suppressed the dramatic element in his later work, and he said yes, that was so—for no one can get every quality into a picture, and there were others that he desired more than the dramatic.”⁴⁰

Nor, of course, is it surprising that Burne-Jones, with his “sympathy for the repose of the Constant schools,” should begin to show the influence of the early Renaissance masters who were engaging Ruskin’s attention. In some respects he had anticipated his mentor, since the copies he had made in 1859 include many after Carpaccio and even a few after Botticelli, two artists of the period 1470–1520 whom Ruskin was not to “discover” until many years later, in each case, as with Luini, priding himself on revealing them to an ignorant British public. Nevertheless, it was only in the mid-1860s that

Burne-Jones began to adopt an overtly Renaissance style and that his sketchbooks show him taking a consistent interest in Italian Renaissance sources, mainly at this stage in the form of copies after Marcantonio’s engravings and memoranda of bronzes and terracottas in the South Kensington Museum. As for the copies after Luini made for Ruskin, they surely helped to develop the famous Burne-Jones type, especially when we remember that Ruskin, once again in his analysis of Vital Beauty, had stressed that the beauty of man, reflecting his spiritual and intellectual nature, was concentrated in his features. But the influence should not be overstressed. From the



Figure 67. Edward Burne-Jones, *Thisbe*, a design for needlework, 1863–64. 54 x 27 in. (137.2 x 68.6 cm). William Morris Gallery, Walthamstow

start Burne-Jones had an extraordinary capacity to stamp his personality on his work, and long before he copied Luini for Ruskin he was drawing and painting faces that could only be by him. Perhaps all we can safely say is that Luini seems to have made them a little more soulful and Leonardesque.

So much for Ruskin's influence on the formal and conceptual aspects of Burne-Jones's later work; there remains the question of its content. A very large proportion of Burne-Jones's paintings from now on were "ideal grotesques" in the Ruskinian sense, whether they were simply allegorical figures—Faith, Hope, Charity, Temperance; illustrated classical mythology; or took their subjects from Chaucer or Spenser, both of whom Ruskin saw as mines of "sacred truth." Two tasks that he undertook for Ruskin shortly after his return from Italy underline the connection. The first was a set of cartoons for needlework that was to be carried out for Ruskin by the girls of Winnington Hall, the school he patronized in Cheshire (fig. 67). The cartoons correspond exactly to Ruskin's ideal, each showing a heroine from Chaucer's "The Legend of Goode Wimmen" as a "beautiful" figure in "perfect repose," and it is not surprising that they also featured in the "Modern Art" lecture, the speaker taking them along to show his audience as an illustration of his meaning. In this case the work was a labor of love on the part of Burne-Jones. But about the same time Ruskin commissioned him to design a series of allegorical and mythological figures to illustrate *Munera Pulveris*, his controversial papers on political economy that had begun to appear in *Fraser's Magazine* in 1863. Nothing much came of this, but Ruskin's ideas can be traced in *The Wine of Circe* (fig. 24), a major painting based on one of the designs which did much to establish Burne-Jones's reputation when it was exhibited in 1869. It might be thought that Circe, the sorceress famous for turning Ulysses' companions into swine, was hardly a force for good; but in Ruskin's analysis she is precisely that, "her power [being] that of frank and full vital pleasure, which, if governed and watched, nourishes men."⁴¹ Moreover, comparison of the early sketches with the finished work shows that during its six-year gestation the picture grew increasingly close to the "constant" ideal. Circe herself becomes more poised and graceful, and her setting, having started as a dim and claustrophobic cell, very medieval in

feeling, ends as an elegant, light-filled chamber with classical furnishings.

1. Robertson 1931, p. 88.
2. Ruskin, *Works*, vol. 5 (1904), p. 49.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 137.
4. *Ibid.*, vol. 36 (1909), p. 313.
5. *Ibid.*, vol. 24 (1906), p. 29.
6. *Ibid.*, vol. 36 (1909), p. 273.
7. Oswald Doughty, *A Victorian Romantic: Dante Gabriel Rossetti*, 2d ed. (London, 1960), p. 241.
8. Ruskin, *Works*, vol. 36 (1909), pp. 329, 404–5.
9. *Ibid.*, vol. 5 (1904), pp. 56, 59, 61.
10. *Ibid.*, vol. 4 (1903), p. 117.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 113.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 119.
13. Ronald Chapman, *The Laurel and the Thorn: A Study of G. F. Watts* (London, 1945), p. 153.
14. Ruskin, *Works*, vol. 24 (1906), p. 27.
15. *Ibid.*, vol. 7 (1905), p. xl.
16. See *Memorials*, vol. 1, p. 175. The pictures were almost certainly some of the early Florentine and Sienese works purchased from the Lombardi-Baldi Collection in 1857.
17. James H. Coombs et al., eds., *A Pre-Raphaelite Friendship: The Correspondence of William Holman Hunt and John Lucas Tupper* (Ann Arbor, Michigan, 1986), p. 215.
18. J. Comyns Carr, *Some Eminent Victorians: Personal Recollections in the World of Art and Letters* (London, 1908), p. 72.
19. It is now in the Watts Gallery, Compton.
20. Now in the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge.
21. Val Prinsep, "An Artist's Life in Italy in 1860 [*sic*]," *Magazine of Art*, 1904, p. 417.
22. Ruskin, *Works*, vol. 9 (1903), p. 188.
23. George P. Landow, *The Aesthetic and Critical Theories of John Ruskin* (Princeton, 1971), pp. 175–76.
24. Ruskin, *Works*, vol. 24 (1906), p. 65.
25. *Ibid.*, vol. 7 (1905), p. 6.
26. Letter to G. P. Boyce, September 5, 1859 (Libraries of the University of Texas at Austin; quoted in Virginia Surtees, *The Paintings and Drawings of Dante Gabriel Rossetti: A Catalogue Raisonné* [Oxford, 1971], p. 69, under no. 114).
27. For a fuller account, see Christian 1975.
28. Ruskin, *Works*, vol. 36 (1909), p. 347.
29. *Memorials*, vol. 1, p. 237.
30. Ruskin, *Works*, vol. 11 (1904), p. 410.
31. *Ibid.*, p. 430.
32. *Memorials*, vol. 1, p. 247.
33. Ruskin, *Works*, vol. 36 (1909), p. 168.
34. *Ibid.*, vol. 19 (1905), p. 203.
35. *Ibid.*, pp. 443–44.
36. *Memorials*, vol. 1, p. 274.
37. Ruskin, *Works*, vol. 36 (1909), p. 468.
38. *Memorials*, vol. 1, p. 256.
39. Ruskin, *Works*, vol. 19 (1905), pp. 206–8.
40. *Memorials*, vol. 1, pp. 296–97.
41. Ruskin, *Works*, vol. 17 (1905), p. 213.

Copy after Bernardino Luini, "Saints Apollonia and Agatha"

1862

Watercolor, 14 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 9 $\frac{1}{8}$ in. (37.5 cm x 25 cm); 12 $\frac{5}{8}$ x 8 $\frac{1}{4}$ in. (32.5 x 21 cm)

In original frame, decorated by the artist

Signed on outer frame: EBJ; on inner mat: E BURNE-JONES FECIT

PROVENANCE: Presented by Alfred de Pass, 1947

Royal Cornwall Museum, Truro (1947-15)

BIRMINGHAM ONLY

Like his first journey to Italy in September and October 1859, Burne-Jones's second visit was at the behest and expense of John Ruskin (1819-1900).¹ Carefully planned to take the artist to sites that Ruskin thought would be most beneficial to his protégé's continuing education in Renaissance art, it took place in the spring of 1862, after both men had endured a difficult winter, Burne-Jones through illness and Ruskin having struggled to complete his essays on political economy (published as *Unto This Last* in 1862). Leaving their young son, Philip, with her parents, Georgiana Burne-Jones

accompanied them; for all three it was an idyllic trip, Ruskin reveling in unaccustomed youthful company.²

Traveling via Paris and Lucerne, the party reached Milan on May 31; there Burne-Jones began to fulfill his obligation to Ruskin to make copies after Old Master paintings and frescoes.³ During the two weeks they were in Milan, there must have been many visits to churches and chapels other than those to the cathedral and to Sant Ambrogio, which Georgie remembered, as well as to the Brera, where Burne-Jones made a study of Gaudenzio Ferrari's *Adoration of the Magi* (1545).⁴ On June 12 the Burne-Joneses set off by themselves for Venice, returning to Milan by July 10.

Before their return, Ruskin had written to Burne-Jones in Venice, reminding him of an outstanding promise to copy "two Christs" by Bernardino Luini (ca. 1480-ca. 1532) in San Maurizio, where he himself had begun a full-scale copy of the figure of Saint Catherine (now in the Ashmolean Museum,



Oxford).⁵ An evocative account of Burne-Jones's work under Ruskin's direction is given by Georgie; after musing on which "Monasterio" it was "to which we went in Milan, with Mr Ruskin, to see Luini's pictures," she quotes from a letter by Edward: "I am drawing from a fresco that has never been seen since the day it was painted, in jet darkness, in a chapel where candlesticks, paper flowers and wooden dolls abound freely. Ruskin, by treacherous smiles and winning courtesies and delicate tips, has wheedled the very candlesticks off the altar for my use, and the saint's table and his [*sic*] everything that was his, and I draw every day now by the light of eight altar candles; also a fat man stands at the door and says the church is shut if anybody comes."⁶

This pair of saints, identifiable by their attributes of martyrdom as Apollonia and Agatha, are so like the work of Luini as to be ascribable to no other artist, although their exact source is not known. They represent the only known finished copies by Burne-Jones from the 1862 Italian journey, by which he had set enough store to present them in one of his most elaborate surviving hand-painted frames; unfortunately, their history prior to ownership by Alfred de Pass is unknown.

Luini's work may not have been familiar to Burne-Jones, although it has always had an appeal to British taste, partly as a result of Ruskin's enthusiasm for its smoothness, simplicity, and grace (which others might call blandness). John Christian has noted, in this context, Ruskin's approval of those North Italian masters of the period 1470 to 1520 who "desire only to make everything dainty, delightful, and perfect."⁷ That this aspect of early Renaissance art made an impression on Burne-Jones's own work can be judged by his developing fondness for rounded, lyrical, and enigmatic female figures of exactly the type he has here elected to copy. Burne-Jones himself recommended Luini's work to Agnes and Frances, the daughters of his patron William Graham, in advance of their tour of Italy in 1876: "Nobody is like him anywhere for perfect beauty . . . hunt him out everywhere—there is nothing in Italy afterwards more lovely to see."⁸

1. See Christian 1975.

2. Ruskin wrote to Pauline Trevelyan from Milan, on July 20, 1862: "I've had the Joneses . . . a good deal with me on this journey—the hotel waiters much puzzled to make out whether *he* was my son or Georgie my daughter" (Virginia Surtees, ed., *Reflections of a Friendship: John Ruskin's Letters to Pauline Trevelyan, 1848–1866* [London, 1979], p. 188).

3. Some of the copies made for Ruskin were passed on to his Drawing School at Oxford, and are now in the Ashmolean Museum; other sketches and less finished copies are in an album at the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge (Arts Council 1975–76, no. 333).

4. *Memorials*, vol. 1, p. 243; the copy after Gaudenzio is in the Ruskin Library, Lancaster University, and is reproduced in Christian 1975, fig. 1 (Arts Council 1975–76, no. 334).

5. *Memorials*, vol. 1, p. 247: "I will have ever so many cwts. [hundredweights] of candles lighted in the Monasterio, and you must sketch the two Christs for me please. This is more important than anything in Venice to me."

6. *Ibid.*, p. 248.

7. Ruskin, *Works*, vol. 19 (1905), pp. 443–44.

8. Quoted in Russell 1978, p. 424.

21.

The Battle of Beth Horon (Joshua Commanding the Sun and Moon to Stand Still)

1863

Sepia and chalk, 61 1/8 x 21 in. (156 x 56 cm)

PROVENANCE: Presented by Charles Fairfax Murray, 1898

EXHIBITED: Arts Council 1975–76, no. 79

Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery (1898P54)

The early work of the young architect George Frederick Bodley happily coincided with the establishment of Morris, Marshall, Faulkner & Co. "The Firm" was commissioned to provide stained glass and painted decoration for several of his new churches; Bodley's invigoration of Gothic Revival architecture in the 1860s was exactly in tune with Morris and Burne-Jones's attitude to decorative art, both of them seeking inspiration from medieval precedent without resorting to imitation or pastiche.¹ Two of the most important churches, both of 1861–62, were All Saints' Church, Selsley, near Stroud in Gloucestershire, and Saint Martin on the Hill, at Scarborough in Yorkshire; each was filled with Morris glass, including eight major subjects by Burne-Jones.²

There are two important stained-glass windows by the firm in Saint Michael and All Angels, Lyndhurst, a spectacular church in the heart of the New Forest, in Hampshire, designed by the architect William White (1825–1900) in 1858. The large east window, with an unusual tracery pattern alternating thin lancets with larger lights, was filled in 1862–63 by subjects illustrating the New Jerusalem, including the Apostles, the Three Marys, and pairs of angel musicians, all numbering among Burne-Jones's best early designs. He was also responsible for six half-length angel musicians in the upper tracery. All these designs, according to his account book with the firm, were made between August 1862 and February 1863.³

In the firm's minute book for April 22, 1863, it is recorded: "Agreed that the cartoons for the south transept window of Lyndhurst be assigned to Jones," and entries in the artist's account book duly include two pairs of cartoons, under August and November 1863, charged at £10 for each design.⁴ The subjects, two from the Old Testament and two from the New Testament, all illustrative of the power of prayer, were titled by the artist himself: *Joshua Staying the Sun and Moon*, *Elijah and the Priests of Baal*, *The Stoning of Saint Stephen*, and *The Liberation of Saint Peter*; all four cartoons are now in the Birmingham collection. It is a testament to Burne-Jones's patience and dedication that he was willing to produce such dramatic and impressive cartoons for so little remuneration. The steady stream of commissions that was now flooding in, as the firm's work became more widely known and admired, especially after the successful display at the International Exhibition of 1862, certainly provided a regular income for a young artist with a family to support, but it would not be long before Burne-Jones began to realize the



inequity of his payment. Such cartoons as these were effectively large paintings in monochrome, which would have taken as much time to plan and execute as his smaller finished watercolors (it was his habit to do stained-glass designs in the evenings, after a day's work in the studio). Acerbic notes written as he made up the partners' payments, surely penned for Morris's eyes, begin to appear in Burne-Jones's account book in the mid-1860s, but these seem to have had little effect, and by the early 1870s he was designing individual figures with sufficient potential to be turned into independent works in watercolor or oil (see cat. nos. 69, 102).

The Lyndhurst cartoons are among Burne-Jones's most elaborate and dynamic, the *Joshua* (also known as *The Battle of Beth Horon*) being the most celebrated. Like the *Saint Frideswide* designs of 1859 (cat. no. 9), a number of scenes and a multitude of figures are heaped together, but now in a much more unified and powerful way, the action making physical sense as a battle raging around the hilltop on which Joshua calmly makes his plea to God to delay the sunset until his rout of the Canaanites is complete. In the other scenes, the sense of foreshortened height is also maintained, through the use of rising ground or sequences of steps. While conveying the full vigor of dramatic action—ingeniously geared to the needs of the glass painter by providing bold outlines of armor, shields, and spears to be used for lead lines—Burne-Jones also introduces some characteristic lighter touches, such as the simple plant motif on the hill (echoing Morris's daisy pattern, used on tiles and textiles from about 1860) and the jolly swirling decoration on the tents at the top. The sense of fun runs also to the inclusion of a portrait of Morris (often used in other of the firm's stained-glass designs to represent Saint Peter) about to fall victim to the sword in the left foreground.

1. For Bodley's work, see David Verey, "George Frederick Bodley: Climax of the Gothic Revival," in *Seven Victorian Architects*, edited by Jane Fawcett (London, 1976), chap. 5, pp. 85–101, and for his association with Morris and Burne-Jones, see "Bodley, Morris and the Gothic Revival in Cambridge," Fitzwilliam Museum 1980, ch. 2, and Whitworth Art Gallery 1984, pp. 147–51.

2. See Sewter 1974–75, vol. 2, pp. 168–78.

3. Sewter 1974–75, vol. 2, p. 124.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 125.



22.

Cinderella

1863

Watercolor and bodycolor on paper, mounted on canvas, 26³/₈ x 12³/₈ in. (67 x 31.5 cm)

Signed and dated lower left: EBJ 1863

PROVENANCE: A. E. Street

EXHIBITED: Old Water-Colour Society, London, 1864, no. 54; New Gallery 1898–99, no. 11; Arts Council 1975–76, no. 40

Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Anonymous gift in memory of Charlotte Beebe Wilbour, 1932 (32.409)

In addition to the six-fold panel illustrating the story of Cinderella (cat. no. 23), Burne-Jones provided Morris, Marshall, Faulkner & Co. with two further designs for tiles in late 1862 that depict the single figure of Cinderella in her rags, sweeping with a broom, and then in the semblance of a queen, with flowing hair and draped gown.¹ This watercolor of 1863 continues the narrative sequence by showing Cinderella once more in the kitchen: “It is the day after the ball, and in her worn and patched green gown, the little glass slipper on her foot, she leans there dreamily playing with the corner of her apron; a pink rose is in a glass on the shelf, and, on the ground beside her, half lost in the shadow, are the pumpkin and the rat which have known such strange transformations [into coach and coachman].”²

Burne-Jones here adds solidity, as well as an increased depth of color, to the type of female figure subject he had been developing since 1860. He once remarked that “you get the beauty of the colour only in the lights,” and this is evident here in the scraped and glazed highlights of Cinderella’s mottled dress, set off by the bright blue of the plates behind her. These are a reminder of the then-current craze for Oriental blue-and-white porcelain, indulged in particularly by Rossetti and Whistler. *Cinderella* was one of the first group of four works submitted by Burne-Jones to the Old Water-Colour Society on his election as an Associate in 1864, where it served as a complement to the slightly larger watercolor *Fair Rosamund* (private collection), also of 1863.³

1. See Myers and Myers 1996, p. 31, pls. 14a,b.

2. De Lisle 1904, p. 68.

3. Arts Council 1975–76, no. 39.



23

23. Cinderella

1863–64

Ceramic tile panel, 22 x 54 1/4 in. (56 x 138 cm); painted by Lucy Faulkner for Morris, Marshall, Faulkner & Co.

Lettered: This is the story of the maid with the shoe of glass and of how she became Queen that was before called Cinder-wench

PROVENANCE: Myles Birket Foster; removed from The Hill, Witley, on demolition, 1952; purchased, 1989

EXHIBITED: William Morris Gallery 1996b, no. 40

Board of Trustees of the National Museums and Galleries on Merseyside, Liverpool (1981.21)

24.

Beauty and the Beast

1863–64

Ceramic tile panel, 22 1/2 x 49 in. (57 x 124.5 cm); painted by Lucy Faulkner for Morris, Marshall, Faulkner & Co.

Lettered: How a Prince who by enchantment was under the form of a beast became a man again by the love of a certain maiden

PROVENANCE: Myles Birket Foster; removed from The Hill, Witley, on demolition, 1952; purchased, 1953

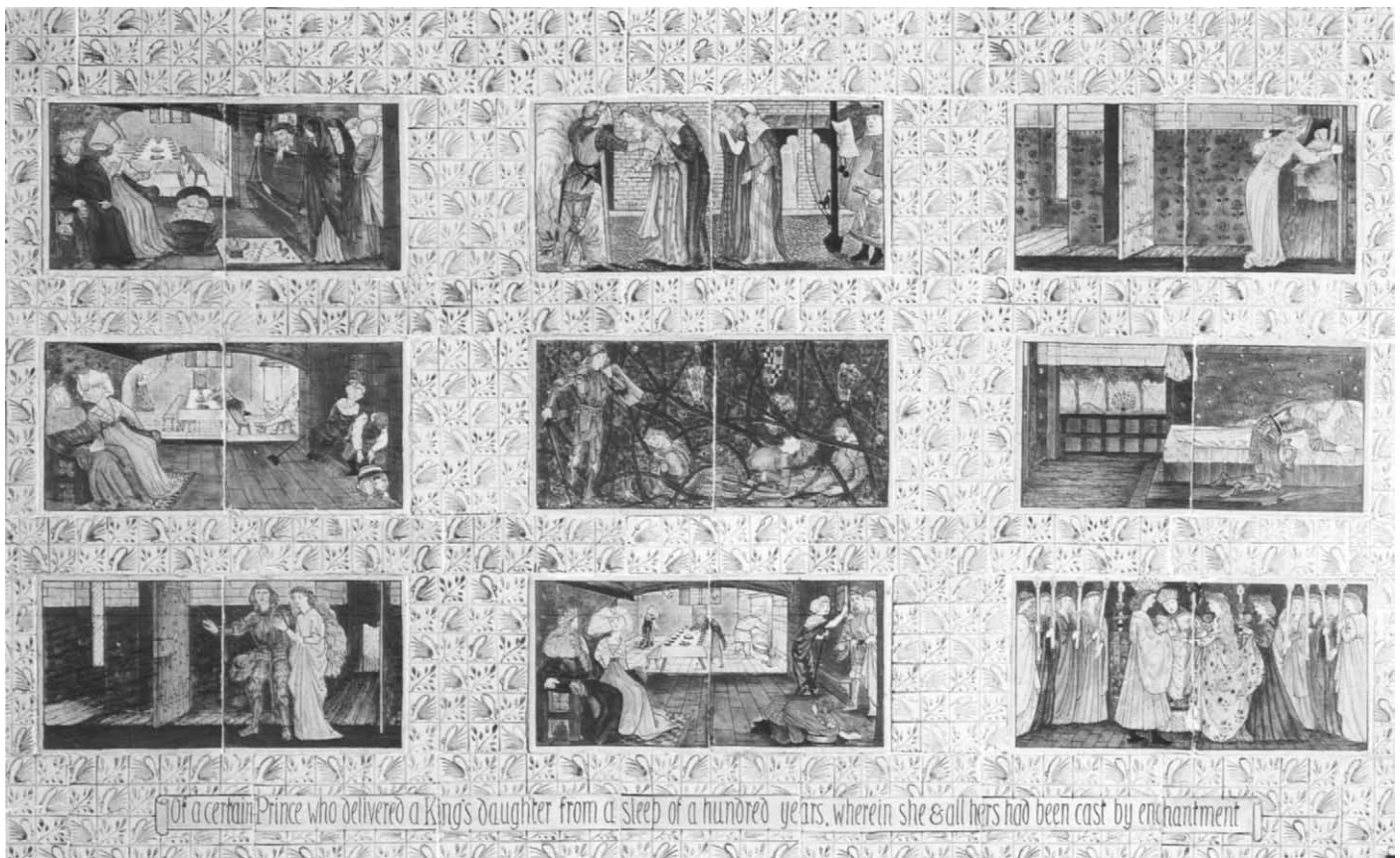
EXHIBITED: Arts Council 1975–76, no. 70; William Morris Gallery 1996b, no. 48

William Morris Gallery, Walthamstow (London Borough of Waltham Forest; C75)

NEW YORK ONLY



24



25

25. Sleeping Beauty

1864

Ceramic tile panel, 30 x 47½ in. (76.2 x 120.6 cm); probably painted by Lucy Faulkner for Morris, Marshall, Faulkner & Co.

Lettered: Of a certain Prince who delivered a King's daughter from a sleep of a hundred years, wherein she & all hers had been cast by enchantment

PROVENANCE: Myles Birket Foster; removed from The Hill, Witley, on demolition, 1952; purchased, 1953

EXHIBITED: Victoria and Albert Museum 1952, no. 181; Victoria and Albert Museum 1996b, no. K.10; William Morris Gallery 1996b, no. 52

Victoria and Albert Museum, London (Circ.520-1953)

NEW YORK AND BIRMINGHAM

One of the products advertised by Morris, Marshall, Faulkner & Co. in a circular of 1862 was "Painted Earthenware, including wall tiles with pictured subjects, figures or patterns." Morris had established the practice of importing white tin-glazed tiles from Holland, which could be painted in enamel and refired (several times, if necessary, for elaborate colors) in his stained-glass kiln. Early experiments included designs by Burne-Jones for a pair of tiles with Adam and Eve and a series of the heroines from Chaucer's "The Legend of Goode Wimmen" (see cat. no. 29), so the firm was fully prepared for a substantial commission from Birket Foster for

large tile panels to stand above three bedroom fireplaces in his new house, The Hill, at Witley, Surrey.¹

The painting of the tiles was largely executed by Kate and Lucy Faulkner (sisters of Morris's partner Charles Faulkner), working from designs supplied by Burne-Jones. His account book includes numerous entries dating from 1862 to 1864 that relate to tiles, the significant ones being for September 30, 1862: "10 designs for Tiles Cinderella £7.10. 0."; July 26, 1863: "Beauty & the Beast £6.0.0."; and January 1864: "To 10 designs of 'Sleeping Beauty' at the mean and unremunerative price of 30/- [shillings] ea[ch] £15.0.0." In addition to the overmantels, there are also figures in the fireplaces below complementing *Cinderella* and *Beauty and the Beast*. All three panels have surrounds offering the first recorded use of the swan-pattern tile, now attributed to Morris. Each set of tiles was repeated once within the next ten years (with some individual variants of *Sleeping Beauty*), but none in such a spectacular manner as the originals.

Despite his habitual complaint over receiving less than he deserved in payment, Burne-Jones must have taken enormous pleasure in constructing these visual narratives, which gave him valuable experience on which to draw when it came to devising more important series of paintings, such as Saint George and the Dragon (cat. nos. 31, 33, 34) and Cupid and Psyche (cat. nos. 40a-1, 41, 42). There was also the sheer fun of it, providing "a welcome outlet for his abounding humour, and in this form the stories of Beauty and the Beast and Cinderella took

at his hands as quaint a shape as they wear in the pages of the Brothers Grimm of blessed memory.”²

As always in the artist’s work, there are figure groups that resonate with previous inspiration or suggest refinements still to come: the musicians in the third scene of *Cinderella* derive from *The Wedding Procession of Sir Degrevant* (cat. no. 11); the first scene of *Beauty and the Beast* prefigures the composition of *Princess Sabra Drawing the Lot* (cat. no. 33), from Saint George and the Dragon; and, most strikingly, the central image of *Sleeping Beauty* precisely foreshadows *The Briar Wood* (cat. no. 55), the first painting in the Briar Rose series of 1871–73.

1. For a full account of the Witley “fairytale narratives,” see Myers and Myers 1996, pp. 28–59, including photographs of the panels in situ (figs. 53–55).
2. *Memorials*, vol. 1, p. 249; as the authors point out, only *Sleeping Beauty* was written by the brothers Grimm, *Cinderella* being by Charles Perrault and *Beauty and the Beast* by Madame de Beaumont.

26. The Merciful Knight

1863

Watercolor and bodycolor, 39 1/2 x 27 1/4 in. (100.3 x 69.2 cm)

Signed and dated: EDWARD BURNE-JONES 1863

Lettered on inner mat of frame: *Of a Knight who forgave his enemy when he might have destroyed him and how the image of Christ kissed him in token that his acts had pleased God*

PROVENANCE: Bought from the artist by James Leathart; W. Marchant; Sir John Middlemore; purchased from the Middlemore Trustees, 1973

EXHIBITED: Old Water-Colour Society, London, 1864, no. 215; New Gallery 1892–93, no. 9; Arts Council 1975–76, no. 45; Tate Gallery 1984, no. 234; Laing Art Gallery 1989–90, no. 20; Tate Gallery 1993, no. 27

Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery (1973/84)

The largest and most important of the artist’s four exhibits at the Old Water-Colour Society in 1864, *The Merciful Knight* seemed to Georgiana Burne-Jones “to sum up and seal the ten years that had passed since Edward first went to Oxford.”¹ Its dense, crusty technique and essentially two-dimensional compositional structure carry echoes of Rossetti’s chivalric watercolors, and there is an additional debt to Rossetti’s Arthurian image of Sir Galahad, in both the illustration to Edward Moxon’s 1857 edition of Tennyson’s *Poems* and its subsequent reworking as a watercolor, *Sir Galahad at the Ruined Chapel* (1859; Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery).² To these Pre-Raphaelite credentials, however, are added a subtlety of color and confident handling of chiaroscuro which were products of Burne-Jones’s increasing knowledge and absorption of Italian Renaissance art.

The subject, too, is of Italian origin. The work was first exhibited under the quotation which appears on the frame (whose outer element appears to be of later date). This text comes from *The Broadstone of Honour*, a collection of stories on the theme of Christian chivalry first published in 1822, and

likened by its author, the antiquarian Kenelm Digby, to “the symbolical wanderings of the ancient knights.” Not surprisingly, it was one of Burne-Jones’s favorite books, which he kept by his bedside throughout his life.³ In the particular tale of the eleventh-century Florentine knight St. John Gualbert, a wooden figure of Christ in a wayside shrine miraculously embraces the knight, in recognition of a deed of mercy performed on Good Friday.

Despite its obvious symbolism, such an obscure story was bound to be lost on a contemporary audience; even Frederic Stephens, a staunch supporter of the Pre-Raphaelite cause, considered it a “strange half-mystical picture.”⁴ The overt historicism of this and *The Annunciation* (“*The Flower of God*”) (cat. no. 27) guaranteed hostile criticism in the art press, the reactionary *Art Journal* deriding the figure of the knight, “[who] seems to shake in his clattering armour,” and judging that “such ultra manifestations of medievalism, however well meant, must tend inevitably, though of course unconsciously, to bring ridicule upon truths which we all desire to hold in veneration.”⁵ That work of this kind was not welcome on the Old Water-Colour Society’s walls, alongside traditional landscape and genre pictures, is confirmed by the artist’s recollection that his fellow members “were furious with me for sending it, and let me see that they were. They would be talking together when I turned up and let drop remarks about it of a hostile nature for me to overhear.”⁶

Three preparatory studies in pencil (all in the Tate Gallery, London) show the development of the composition, in which a central altar is eliminated in favor of the obliquely illuminated platform and the knight given a suit of armor similar to the one worn by the king in the *Adoration* triptych (cat. no. 10).⁷



Edward Burne-Jones. Study for *The Merciful Knight*, ca. 1863. Pencil, 10 x 6 in. (25.4 x 15.2 cm). Tate Gallery, London



In the middle ground, the artist relieves the stark tension of the miraculous event by introducing a rose trellis, akin to the motif previously used in *The Backgammon Players* (cat. no. 17). The marigolds in the foreground came from the “town-garden” in Russell Square, close to the Burne-Joneses’ house opposite the British Museum.⁸

1. *Memorials*, vol. 1, p. 262.
2. Art Services International 1995–96, no. 50.
3. “But there was a kind of book that he reserved for himself and never liked any one to read to him—The Broad Stone of Honour and Mores Catholici are instances: they were kept in his own room, close to his hand, and often dipped into in wakeful nights or early mornings. ‘Sillyish books both,’ he once said, ‘but I can’t help it, I like them’” (*Memorials*, vol. 2, p. 56).
4. *Athenaeum*, June 1864, p. 618.
5. *Art Journal*, June 1864, p. 170.
6. *Lago* 1981, p. 107.
7. Tate Gallery 1993, nos. 22–24; two are reproduced in Art Services International 1995–96, figs. 69, 70. The Tate Gallery also has nude studies for the figure of the knight.
8. *Memorials*, vol. 1, pp. 261–62.

27.

The Annunciation (“The Flower of God”)

1863

Watercolor and bodycolor, 24 x 21 in. (61 x 53.3 cm)

Signed, inscribed, and numbered “1” on artist’s label attached to reverse of frame

PROVENANCE: Commissioned by George and Edward Dalziel; Edward’s sale, Christie’s, June 19, 1886, lot 5; William Collart; A. M. Collart; Maas Gallery, London; Lady Gibson; Christie’s, June 12, 1992, lot 97

EXHIBITED: Old Water-Colour Society, London, 1864, no. 200; Royal Jubilee Exhibition, Manchester, 1887, no. 1300; New Gallery 1892–93, no. 5; New Gallery 1898–99, no. 59; Arts Council 1975–76, no. 43

Collection Lord Lloyd-Webber

NEW YORK ONLY



On a visit to Burne-Jones's studio in 1862, in connection with illustrations for their *Bible Gallery*, the engraver brothers George and Edward Dalziel were "so fascinated with the man and his art that we at once asked him to paint a water colour drawing, size and subject to be left to him. About that time he had painted a picture, 'A Harmony in Blue,' for John Ruskin, and it was suggested that ours should be 'A Harmony in Red.' After some months the result was a most highly elaborated water colour, 'The Annunciation.'"¹ Georgiana Burne-Jones recorded that it was painted in the summer of 1863 during a stay with the painter J. R. Spencer Stanhope at his house, Sandroyd, near Cobham, Surrey, where studies were also made for the background to *The Merciful Knight* (cat. no. 26).²

Knowing that the Dalziels were going abroad, the artist wrote at the beginning of August to ask if he could "keep 'The Annunciation' in my studio until you return; for, as I do not exhibit, that is my only way of letting people see what I have been doing."³ In the following February, however, Burne-Jones was elected an Associate of the Society of Painters in Water-Colours (the "Old" Water-Colour Society), and the work became one of his first four exhibits in 1864, along with *Fair Rosamund* (1863; private collection), *Cinderella* (cat. no. 22), and *The Merciful Knight*. Criticism of his work in the art press focused on the early Italian spirit of his work epitomized by *The Annunciation*, causing the *Art Journal*'s reviewer to pronounce that "had Duccio of Siena, or Cimabue of Florence, walked into Pall Mall and hung upon these walls their mediæval and archaic panels, surely no greater surprise could have been in reserve for the visitors to the gallery." The same notice went on to deride the composition as "a bedstead set above a garden, at which the Virgin kneels in her night-dress. The angel Gabriel in his flight appears to have been caught in an apple-tree; however, he manages to look in at a kind of trap-door opening to tell his errand."⁴ Such a hostile reception is reminiscent of the critics' reaction to early Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood paintings, and Burne-Jones was being no less challenging, this time to the conventions of watercolor painting, in combining dramatic compositional effects with references to the art of the early Renaissance.

Giotto is indeed invoked, through a general echo of the frescoes in the Arena Chapel at Padua (and perhaps more particularly *The Angel Appearing to Anna*), which Burne-Jones had seen in 1862, in the company of Ruskin. Equally important is the example of Carpaccio, whose work Burne-Jones had studied extensively in Venice on the same trip. A number of elements in *The Annunciation*, including the red bed hangings, book, slippers, and Oriental rug, also feature in the *Dream of Saint Ursula* (1495; Accademia, Venice), where the angel similarly appears in a ray of light.

1. Dalziel and Dalziel 1901, p. 164. Ruskin's watercolor was probably *Viridis of Milan* (1861; present whereabouts unknown).

2. *Memorials*, vol. 1, p. 261.

3. Dalziel and Dalziel 1901, p. 166.

4. *Art Journal*, June 1864, p. 170.



28

28.

Legend of Good Women: Chaucer Asleep

1864

Stained-glass panel, 18 1/8 x 18 7/8 in. (46.2 x 47.2 cm); executed by Morris, Marshall, Faulkner & Co.

PROVENANCE: Purchased from the Stained Glass Exhibition, South Kensington, 1864

EXHIBITED: Arts Council 1975–76, no. 84; Victoria and Albert Museum 1996, no. H.29a

Victoria and Albert Museum, London (774–1864)



29

29.

Legend of Good Women: Amor and Alcestis

1864

Stained-glass panel, 18¼ x 19½ in. (46.2 x 49.5 cm); executed by Morris, Marshall, Faulkner & Co.

PROVENANCE: Purchased from the Stained Glass Exhibition, South Kensington, 1864

EXHIBITED: Arts Council 1975–76, no. 84; Victoria and Albert Museum 1996, no. H.29c

Victoria and Albert Museum, London (776–1864)

The works of the fourteenth-century poet Geoffrey Chaucer had been among Morris and Burne-Jones's favorite reading in their student days at Oxford. A medieval reworking of romantic stories, particularly those of classical origin, held an appeal for both men, and influenced Morris in



Edward Burne-Jones, *Chaucer Asleep*, 1864. Pencil, 19¼ x 19¼ in. (50 x 50 cm). Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery



Edward Burne-Jones, *Amor and Alcestis*, 1864. Pencil, pen and ink, and sepia, 19¼ x 21¼ in. (50.2 x 54 cm). Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery

the shaping of his cycle of narrative poems *The Earthly Paradise* as much as it did Burne-Jones in the choice of subjects for paintings and decorative designs.

Burne-Jones was especially fond of Chaucer's "The Legend of Goode Wimmen," a long poem in the form of a dream in which Amor (Love) introduces the poet to famous women from antiquity who have suffered for love. Ideally suitable for a sequence of images of romantic heroines, the theme was first used for a series of tiles Burne-Jones designed for Morris, Marshall, Faulkner & Co. in 1862, which exist in a number of variations.¹ The following year he devised a running frieze of roughly similar figures, as a design for an embroidery to be made by the girls of Winnington Hall school, Cheshire, as a gift for Ruskin, who in 1863 was considering leaving England to settle in Switzerland; neither plan came to fruition.²

In 1864 the designs were again revised, this time for a set of seven stained-glass windows for The Hill at Witley, Surrey, the house that the watercolorist Myles Birket Foster was gradually filling with decorative art by Morris and Burne-Jones (see cat. nos. 23–25). The first two show Chaucer asleep and his vision of Amor and Alcestis, the latter symbolic of faithfulness and eternal love. Then follow five pairs of unhappy heroines: Cleopatra and Dido, Thisbe and Philomela, Hypsipile and Medea, Ariadne and Lucretia, Phyllis and Hypermnestra. Burne-Jones's cartoons look simple, but are very carefully contrived to place the figures within a great variety of detail, with lively stylized foliage set off against an imaginative architectural background. To remind Morris of the work that had gone into them, Burne-Jones's account for January 1864 is "To 7 windows of Good Women at ditto ditto [i.e., the mean and unremunerative] price of £3 ea[ch] £21"; the previous entry was for designs for the Sleeping Beauty tiles (cat. no. 25).³

The panels shown here are duplicates made for display at the Exhibition of Stained Glass, Mosaic etc., held at the South Kensington Museum in 1864, where they were bought (together with a third, *Cleopatra and Dido*) for the permanent collection of the museum, the forerunner of the Victoria and Albert. The glass made for The Hill has been dispersed, but a set of six of the Legend of Good Women subjects (lacking the image of Chaucer) survives in the Combination Room at Peterhouse, Cambridge.⁴ This was made in 1869, and must have necessitated some reworking of the cartoons, occasioning the remark in Burne-Jones's account book: "to touching up some Good Women, & I would rather have been boiled ten times over. £1 1s."⁵

From the scrappy but intriguing sketch of 1863, Burne-Jones produced a number of large individual designs for embroidery, having gone to Winnington for the purpose in the spring of 1864.⁶ These included a different and more elaborate version of *Chaucer Asleep* (Ruskin Library, Lancaster University), which shows the poet in his study, with books and medieval furniture.⁷ This passed to Ruskin, who gave two other cartoons, *Amor and Alcestis* and *Hypsipile and Medea*, to Oxford

University in 1875 as part of a collection supporting the work of the Ruskin Drawing School. In a lecture entitled "On the Present State of Modern Art," delivered at the British Institution on June 7, 1867, Ruskin, in his first public appraisal of Burne-Jones's work, enthused over the cartoons. Noting the artist's fidelity to the poet's description of Love—"And in his hand methought I saw him hold / Two fiery darts . . . / And angel-like his wings I saw him spread"—Ruskin judged that Burne-Jones had superseded Chaucer's image of "perfect human passion," and had "gone farther into the meaning of the old Greek myth, and . . . given the Spirit of the Love that lies beyond the grave—pilgrim love, which goes forth into another country and to a far distant shrine."⁸

Burne-Jones returned to the theme again for a watercolor, *Chaucer's Dream of Good Women* (private collection), painted in 1865 and exhibited at the Old Water-Colour Society in 1867, which shows Chaucer asleep at a fountain, with Love (holding one larger arrow) leading Alcestis and a group of the other heroines.⁹

1. Myers and Myers 1996, pp. 21–25.
2. The sketch design is in Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery (13'04); see Whitworth Art Gallery 1984, pp. 197–202.
3. Sewter 1974–75, vol. 2, pp. 103, 206.
4. See Fitzwilliam Museum 1980, pp. 45–46.
5. Sewter 1974–75, vol. 2, p. 45.
6. "We stayed on at Winnington until Edward had finished many cartoons of 'Good Women,' but the joint embroidery scheme proved impracticable, and the drawings alone remained as a symbol of loving intentions" (*Memorials*, vol. 1, p. 276).
7. Whitworth Art Gallery 1984, no. 162, illus.
8. Ruskin, *Works*, vol. 19 (1905), pp. 207–8, pls. 6, 7. Another cartoon in the series formerly belonging to Ruskin, *Philomela*, was sold at Sotheby's, November 26, 1986, lot 21.
9. Christie's, October 25, 1991, lot 26; its first owner was the painter Frederic Leighton (1830–1896), who hung it above his bed.

30.

Le Chant d'Amour

1865

Watercolor with bodycolor on paper mounted on panel, 22 x 30¾ in.
(56 x 78 cm)

Signed and dated on tablet lower left: EBJ 1865

PROVENANCE: Bought from the artist by William Graham; his sale, Christie's, April 3, 1886, lot 153, 580 gns., to Edward Clifford; Martin Brimmer, Boston, probably by 1891

EXHIBITED: Old Water-Colour Society, London, 1866, no. 72

Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Bequest of Martin Brimmer, 1906 (06.2432)
NEW YORK ONLY

Painted in 1865 and exhibited at the Old Water-Colour Society the following year, this picture marks the climax of the Venetian tendency in Burne-Jones's early work; in particular, it reflects the type of composition popularized by Giorgione (died 1510) and his followers: a group of figures in a pastoral setting, lacking a strong narrative content but rich in

mood, with hints of amorous dalliance and a musical dimension to set the emotional tone. Burne-Jones's interest in Venetian sources, shared by so many of his circle at this date, is evident as early as 1859–60 in such works as *Buondelmonte's Wedding* (cat. no. 7) and *Sidonia von Bork* (cat. no. 12); but it intensified following his three-week stay in Venice in the summer of 1862, during which he made copies of Venetian paintings for his mentor John Ruskin. As he later told his assistant T. M. Rooke, he came back from Venice "thinking there could be no painting in the world but Carpaccio's and the other Venetians."¹¹

Giorgionesque paintings are represented among Burne-Jones's early copies, for example, *The Rich Man's Feast* by Bonifazio (1487–1553), which he noted in the Accademia, Venice, in 1862.² But the picture of this type which probably impressed him most was the so-called *Concert Champêtre* in the Louvre, then given to Giorgione himself but now considered to be an early work by his associate Titian. This celebrated picture had inspired a sonnet by Rossetti in 1849, and Burne-Jones probably saw it on visits to the Louvre in 1855, 1859, and 1862.

It was primarily the influence of Giorgione, sanctioning an emphasis on atmosphere at the expense of narrative and encouraging the use of musical reference, that enabled Burne-Jones to make such a major contribution to the cult of Aestheticism as it emerged in the 1860s. Music, according to Walter Pater in his essay "The School of Giorgione" (1877), was the art toward which all the others should "constantly aspire" in their search for formal perfection, and an interesting table could be drawn up, listing the artists involved according to whether they were genuinely musical or only paid lip service to this ideal. Rossetti and Whistler, though major players, had little musical awareness, but Frederic Leighton, Walter Crane, Henry Holiday, and Simeon Solomon, to name but four, were all genuine devotees. None, however, was more so than Burne-Jones. His taste was catholic; we hear of his being "enraptured" by Meyerbeer³ and thrilled by Wagner, but it was early and traditional music that excited him most. He himself was not a performer, although he is said to have kept a small organ in his studio, but several in his circle were. One was Peter Paul Marshall, a rather inactive partner of the Morris firm, who would regale his friends with musical renderings of "Clerk Saunders," "Sir Patrick Spens," and other Scottish ballads.⁴ Another was the artist and musicologist Henry Ellis Wooldridge, later Slade Professor at Oxford. "He introduced us," wrote Georgie Burne-Jones in her account of the year 1866, "to a new world of beauty in Italian songs of the seventeenth century—then almost entirely unknown—and his singing of Carissimi and Stradella gave us the keenest pleasure: Edward used to ask him for the same things over and over again."⁵

But it was Georgie herself who provided most of the music that Burne-Jones found so inspiring. She was a talented pianist and had a good singing voice, as many of her friends bore witness. The artist William Bell Scott recorded her singing "the ballad of 'Green Sleeves' and others in loud wild tones, quite



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novel and charming.”⁶ “Mrs Jones,” wrote G. P. Boyce after an evening at The Grange in April 1869, “sang several things of Glück and Beethoven and Schubert, and charmed us in this way till nearly 1 o’clock.”⁷ A similar account was left by the Burne-Joneses’ American friend Charles Eliot Norton. “Mrs Jones,” he told a correspondent the same year, “has a pleasant voice, pleasantly cultivated—and her music is of a rare sort, and not of the modern but of the former better English school. She will sing for an hour delightfully from Haydn, from Cherubini, from Bach, or will turn from these composers to the lighter style of the old Shakespearian and Ben Jonson songs, or the still older English airs and French chansons. At the piano she sings as one of Stothard’s beauties ought to.”⁸

Le Chant d’Amour takes its title from the refrain of an old Breton song, probably one that figured in Georgie’s repertoire:

*Hélas! je sais un chant d’amour,
Triste ou gai, tour à tour.*

Certainly the design was conceived as part of the decoration of a small upright piano, made by F. Priestley of Berners Street, London, in unpolished American walnut, which was given to the Burne-Joneses as a wedding present in 1860 (Victoria and Albert Museum, London). Painted in monochrome on the inside of the lid, probably about 1863, the composition at this

stage included only the lady playing the organ and the figure of Cupid, or Love, at the bellows. When the present watercolor was painted a year or two later, the figures were refined and modified, a lovesick knight in armor was added at the left, and a landscape setting filled the background with romantic “Arthurian” buildings and the foreground with wallflowers and tulips. The following year, 1866, another version was painted, omitting the figure of Cupid,⁹ and in 1868 the large, definitive version was started in oils, being completed in 1877 (cat. no. 84). Meanwhile, the composition had made yet another appearance, in a highly personal context which speaks volumes for its significance for Burne-Jones. It is reduced to miniature proportions in an illuminated manuscript placed in the hands of the artist’s mistress, Maria Zambaco, in the portrait he painted of her in 1870 (cat. no. 49).

The present watercolor was one of the first pictures by Burne-Jones to be acquired by William Graham (fig. 70), who, like his rival collector F. R. Leyland (fig. 69), was first attracted to Burne-Jones’s work at the Old Water-Colour Society, to which the artist was elected in 1864. A Scot of strict evangelical faith, Graham had made a fortune as an India merchant and belonged to the Liberal establishment, entering Parliament as a close ally of W. E. Gladstone in 1865. He was to become not only Burne-Jones’s staunchest patron but a

close friend and trusted adviser; indeed, during the last years of Graham's life he effectively acted as his agent, negotiating the sale of *King Cophetua and the Beggar Maid* (cat. no. 112) to Lord Wharnclyffe and of the Briar Rose paintings (cat. nos. 55–58) to Agnew's. Graham also had an important influence on Burne-Jones's development. It was typical of him that he bought *Le Chant d'Amour* as he particularly liked this kind of composition, Venetian in concept, rich in color, romantic or elegiac in mood. His consistent interest in acquiring such works ensured that Burne-Jones's art retained a Venetian dimension long after the focus of his interest had moved to Florentine, Byzantine, and other visual sources.

Le Chant d'Amour was the more important of two pictures that Burne-Jones showed at the OWCS in 1866, and it attracted the usual criticism that his work evoked at this date. Everyone agreed that his sense of color was remarkable, but his drawing was considered weak and the sentiment expressed was regarded as elitist, escapist, and morbid. "Only those who have fed their eyes and minds on medieval pictures and poems are likely to admire or appreciate such drawings as 'Le Chant d'Amour,'" wrote Tom Taylor in the *Times*. "Mr Jones's work," he continued,

is the result of a passionate study of Dante and the Morte d'Arthur, early glass painting and medieval missal work, all grafted on Giorgione. The legends and the art of an immature but poetic time have taken entire possession of him, and absolutely compelled to their service the sentiment of a fine colourist, which he unquestionably possesses, while they favour the unskilfulness of an immature draughtsman. . . . Those who feel repelled by the prose and pain of common life are ready to overlook much bad drawing and much positive ugliness of form in the charm that Mr Jones's utterly unreal work exerts over them. There is no reason this kind of taste should not be catered for, but it is well to bear in mind that after all it is but a dilettante cowardice that is forced to retire from real life, its beauty and its ugliness, its joys, sorrows, and interests, to take refuge in these reminiscences of the past. No really creative imagination ever satisfied itself on such husks and echoes.¹⁰

The *Art Journal* went in for heavy sarcasm. "Behold what the good gods have provided for you in the works of Mr Burne Jones!" its critic exclaimed. "Gracious heavens! What profundity of thought, what noble teaching, what mystery of loveliness are here brought forth for the delight and edification of the elect!" After a swipe at the artist's other contribution, *Zephyrus and Psyche* (private collection), the writer continued: "But for the worshippers of the supernatural, food still more sustaining to the soul is provided in that marvellous and mysterious conception, 'Le Chant d'Amour.' . . . It is simply hopeless to try to touch such performances by criticism. A habeus corpus cannot enter a madhouse. There is no means whereby a work absolutely insane can be brought into the courts of reason."¹¹

Even the more sympathetic F. G. Stephens, writing in the *Athenaeum*, had reservations. Having praised "that exquisite gift of colour which places Mr Jones in the front ranks of English Art," he went on to deplore the artist's apparently willful quaintness, his "love of conceits in design, such as obtained in the fifteenth century in Italy more than elsewhere, and are opposed to the highest feeling no less than to the purest practice of Art." The detail that particularly irritated Stephens was the "blind Cupid bodily work[ing] the bellows of the organ—too literal a means of expressing an exquisite fancy."¹²

It is hard today to appreciate what all the fuss was about, but a glance at the OWCS catalogues goes far to explain it. Most of the exhibitors—Edward Duncan (1803–1882), David Cox, Jr. (1809–1885), William Callow (1812–1908), and the like—were loyal adherents of the English watercolor tradition, focusing their attention on landscape; and although there were artists, such as Samuel Palmer (1805–1881) and John Gilbert (1817–1897), who branched out into romantic sentiment or literary figure subjects, they belonged to an older generation whose style had long since won acceptance. Even most of the up-and-coming younger men—Myles Birket Foster (1825–1899), G. P. Boyce (1826–1897), and Fred Walker (1840–1875)—were not likely to upset conservative sensibilities, and Burne-Jones himself might have attracted less obloquy if his work had been more retiring. As it was, it not only differed radically in style and inspiration from that of his peers but grabbed the eye by being much stronger in tone and on a much larger scale than the traditional watercolor. Here, in fact, was his greatest offense; his work demanded to be seen and could be placed only in a prominent position. As Stephens wrote of *Le Chant d'Amour*, the picture "occupies the place of honour, . . . and deserves it."¹³ No wonder old fogies were upset, and in 1870 they took their revenge by virtually forcing him to resign.

At the Graham sale in 1886 *Le Chant d'Amour* was bought by Burne-Jones's friend and follower Edward Clifford (1844–1907), who had a particular interest in these early watercolors. He had been among the young artists who, as he put it, were "made captive for ever" by the work Burne-Jones showed at the OWCS in the 1860s,¹⁴ and he later owned a number of examples, while making faithful copies of others. *Le Chant d'Amour*, however, did not stay with him long, as it was in the possession of the Boston collector Martin Brimmer by 1891.

[JC]

1. Lago 1981, p. 167.

2. Copy in Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge.

3. *Memorials*, vol. 1, p. 114.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 238.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 302.

6. William Bell Scott, *Autobiographical Notes* (London, 1892), p. 59.

7. Surtees 1980, p. 50.

8. Sara Norton and M. A. DeWolfe Howe, eds., *Letters of Charles Eliot Norton* (London, 1913), vol. 1, p. 348. A sketch by Burne-Jones of Georgie at the piano is reproduced in *Memorials*, vol. 1, p. 218; another was sold at Christie's, June 7, 1996, lot 555, illus.

9. Private collection; exhibited Arts Council 1975–76, no. 86.

10. *Times* (London), May 9, 1866, p. 6.

11. *Art Journal*, 1866, p. 174.

12. *Athenaeum*, no. 2010 (May 5, 1866), p. 604.

13. *Ibid.*

14. [Edward Clifford], *Broadlands As It Was* (London, 1890), p. 49.

Saint George and the Dragon

A certain town in Libya named Selene was devastated by a monstrous dragon whose lair was in a marsh near the city. After sacrificing their herds, the townspeople were compelled to offer their children, who were taken by lot, and the whole city was filled with the lamentations of the parents.

Now, the king had a daughter called Sabra, renowned for her beauty, whom he withheld from the lot-drawing; but the people murmured against this; and, after a while, when many had perished, he was compelled to give her up, and shortly the lot fell upon her, and the king was obliged to let her go. On the day appointed she was led to the place of sacrifice, and left to her fate, but St. George, who was passing through the city, hearing of her sorrowful case, determined to fight the dragon, whom he overcame and slew, and returned to the city with the Princess, where they were received with great rejoicing, and the king and his people afterwards became Christians, and were baptized.¹

The story of Saint George and the dragon would have been known to Burne-Jones from *The Golden Legend*, a medieval manual of ecclesiastical lore by the thirteenth-century writer Jacobus de Voragine; it also appears in another of his favorite books, Thomas Percy's *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* (1765). The theme had been used by Rossetti for watercolors of 1857 (*The Wedding of Saint George and the Princess Sabra*) and 1862 (*Saint George and the Princess Sabra*; both in the Tate Gallery, London), and for a set of six stained-glass windows made by Morris, Marshall, Faulkner & Co. in 1862.² In addition, there was the firm's Saint George Cabinet, painted by Morris himself, which had remained unsold after display at the International Exhibition of 1862 (see cat. no. 18).

In 1865, as part of a continuing plan to furnish his house at Witley, in Surrey (see cat. nos. 23–25), the watercolorist Myles Birket Foster commissioned from Burne-Jones a suite of seven canvases to hang in the dining room. For the first series of paintings he had undertaken Burne-Jones made a preliminary set of highly finished pencil drawings, six of which are now in the British Museum (the missing subject being the Princess Sabra Led to the Dragon); these passed into the ownership of his brother-in-law, the artist and future President of the Royal Academy, Edward Poynter (1836–1919). The more than sixty preparatory drawings in the Birmingham collection, ranging from thumbnail sketches to full-length figure studies, testify to the artist's habitual



Edward Burne-Jones, *The King's Daughter*, 1865–66. Oil on canvas, 42 $\frac{1}{8}$ x 26 $\frac{3}{8}$ in. (107 x 67 cm). Musée d'Orsay, Paris

commitment to a meticulous working-out of every detail of a subject in hand.³

The paintings took two years to complete, with the help in 1867 of the artist's first studio assistant, Charles Fairfax Murray (1849–1919). Sold by Birket Foster in 1894, they were retouched by Burne-Jones in 1895 and shown in public several times over the next few years, winning him a gold medal at the VII Internationale Kunstausstellung at Munich in 1897. Their last appearance together was at the artist's memorial exhibition at the New Gallery, London, in 1898–99, after which they were dispersed.

At the two London gallery exhibitions of 1895 and 1896, the Saint George series was shown with accompanying lines from William Morris's *The Earthly Paradise*. This long narrative sequence of poems retelling classical and medieval stories was begun in 1865, but it is uncertain whether these verses predate Burne-Jones's designs.

1. Preface, in Gooden Gallery 1896. According to some imaginative later sources, Saint George returned with the princess to England, settling in his supposed native town of Coventry.

2. Sewter 1974–75, vol. 2, p. 103; the panels are in the Victoria and Albert Museum (Victoria and Albert Museum 1996, nos. H.14, 15). For a subsequent set of five panels, executed in 1872, see Art Services International 1995–96, nos. 60–64.

3. Birmingham collection 1939, pp. 66–76.



31



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31.

Saint George and the Dragon: The Petition to the King

1865–66

Oil on canvas, 42 x 72 in. (106.7 x 183 cm)

Signed and dated lower left: EBJ 1865

PROVENANCE: Myles Birket Foster; his sale, Christie's, April 28, 1894; C. Sidney Goldmann; Sir Edmund Davis; his sale, Christie's, July 7, 1939; purchased and presented by William Henry Donner, 1939

EXHIBITED: Thomas McLean Gallery, London, 1895; Gooden Gallery 1896; VII Internationale Kunstausstellung, Munich, 1897; New Gallery 1898–99, no. 66

*Hanover College, Indiana (3430A)
NEW YORK AND BIRMINGHAM*

32.

Saint George and the Dragon: The Petition to the King

1865–66

Pencil, 13 7/8 x 23 1/4 in. (35.2 x 60.4 cm)

PROVENANCE: Edward Poynter; bequeathed by Cecil French, 1954

Trustees of the British Museum (1954–5–8–10)

BIRMINGHAM ONLY

. . . The frightened people thronging came
About the palace, and drove back the guards,
Making their way past all the gates and wards;
And, putting chamberlains and marshals by,
Surged round the very throne tumultuously.



Edward Burne-Jones, Sketch for *The Petition to the King*, ca. 1865. Pencil, $3\frac{1}{2} \times 6\frac{1}{2}$ in. (9 x 16.5 cm). Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery

Of all the drawings in the series, this has the deepest, velvety richness of pencil work, particularly in the robes of the king and his counselor. There are several individual studies for the petitioners in the Birmingham collection, as well as a sketch design for the composition which more closely adheres to Morris's text. In both the drawing and the oil the three kneeling figures on the right have replaced a group of agitated townspeople being held back by a guard. An additional supplicant figure also appears, his gesticulation suggesting a narrative of the dragon's reduction of his victims to the rended cloth and bones produced for the king's inspection.¹ Having added the element of bright color to the painting, Burne-Jones increases the expansiveness of the scene by eliminating the foreground tree.

1. A pencil study for this figure, retrospectively inscribed "Story of S. George/ The bones brought to King," is in the Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery (491'27); reproduced in Martin 1997, fig. 43.

33.

Saint George and the Dragon: Princess Sabra Drawing the Lot

1865–66

Oil on canvas, 42 x 72 in. (106.7 x 183 cm)

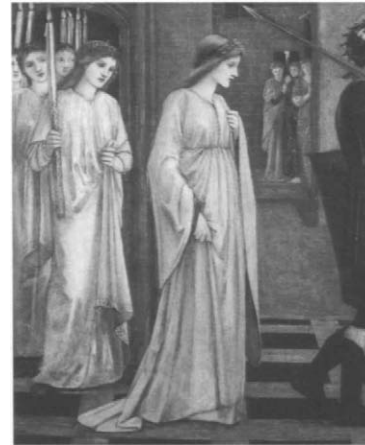
PROVENANCE: Myles Birket Foster; his sale, Christie's, April 28, 1894; C. Sidney Goldmann; Sir Edmund Davis; his sale, Christie's, July 7, 1939; purchased and presented by William Henry Donner, 1939

EXHIBITED: Thomas McLean Gallery, London, 1895; Gooden Gallery 1896; VII Internationale Kunstausstellung, Munich, 1897; New Gallery 1898–99, no. 71

Hanover College, Indiana (3430B)

NEW YORK AND BIRMINGHAM

And there she stood
 . . . pale as privet blossom is in June,
 shrunk like a leaf
 The autumn frost first touches on the tree,
 Stared round about with eyes that could not see,
 -And muttered sounds from lips that said no word,



Edward Burne-Jones, *The Princess Led to the Dragon*, 1865–66. Oil on canvas, $42\frac{1}{2} \times 38$ in. (108 x 96.6 cm). Private collection



And still within her ears the sentence heard,
 and silence fell on all
 'Twixt marble columns and adorned wall.

The third subject has a similar friezelike composition, with the princess's attendants, this time standing, in place of the petitioners. There are some variations of detail between the pencil drawing (British Museum, London, acc. no. 1954-5-8-11, signed and dated 1865-66) and the painting: in the latter, the princess seems more resigned to her fate as she draws the fatal lot labeled "MORITURA" (She who shall die). A sense of claustrophobic tension remains, emphasized by the disconcerting sea of hooded onlookers below the dais. The statuette of an ancient goddess on the left holds a globe, presumably symbolizing fortune, while, as John Franklin Martin has observed, the Gothic lectern with an eagle subduing a serpent may be read as a prefiguration of the eventual triumph of Saint George over the dragon, and of Christianity over paganism.¹

The next scene is of the princess led to the dragon, a vertical composition for which the drawing is missing. The oil was in a private collection in the United States until it was sold recently at Christie's (October 25, 1991, lot 25).

1. Martin 1997, p. 332.

34.

Saint George and the Dragon: The Princess Tied to the Tree

1866

Oil on canvas, 41 7/8 x 36 1/4 in. (106.5 x 93.5 cm)

Signed and dated: EB-J 1866

PROVENANCE: Myles Birket Foster; his sale, Christie's, April 28, 1894; C. Sidney Goldmann; William Hesketh Lever, 1st Viscount Leverhulme; Newark Museum

EXHIBITED: Thomas McLean Gallery, London, 1895; Gooden Gallery 1896; VII Internationale Kunstausstellung, Munich, 1897, no. 226; New Gallery 1898-99, no. 97

The FORBES Magazine Collection, New York (85043)

NEW YORK AND BIRMINGHAM

Longer the shades grew, quicker sank the sun,
 Until at last the day was well-nigh done.

In contrast to the untroubled serenity of Princess Sabra's first appearance (see illus. p. 101), she now stands limply in despair against a dark and sinister background, as her attendants hurry away. The related drawing, which is in the British Museum (1954-5-8-12), is in the least pristine condition of the series.





35

35.

Saint George Slaying the Dragon (The Fight)

1865–66

Pencil, 13⁷/₈ x 16⁷/₈ in. (35.1 x 41.5 cm)

PROVENANCE: Edward Poynter; bequeathed by Cecil French, 1954

EXHIBITED: Arts Council 1975–76, no. 89

Trustees of the British Museum (1954–5–8–13)

BIRMINGHAM ONLY

..... The hero stood,
His bright face shadowed by the jaws of death,
His hair blown backwards by the poisonous breath
..... the blue blade did meet
The wrinkled neck, and with no faltering stroke,
Like a god's hand the fell enchantment broke.

Along with the comparable scene of the rescue of Andromeda in the Perseus series (cat. no. 96), this is among Burne-Jones's most animated compositions. After Saint George and the Dragon and Cupid and Psyche, his tendency moved toward symbolic representation—even in treating the passion and mayhem of the Trojan War (cat. nos. 50–53)—rather than dramatic narrative. On seeing the Saint George paintings again at Christie's in 1894, Georgiana Burne-Jones was "surprised by their dramatic character. . . . I spoke of this to Edward afterwards, asking him whether he had not purposely suppressed the dramatic element in his later

work, and he said yes, that was so for no one can get every quality into a picture, and there were others that he desired more than the dramatic."¹

Some of the finest preparatory drawings for the series, now at Birmingham, are for this scene and include several powerful nude studies for the figure of Saint George; a large and vigorous compositional design for the saint's fight with the dragon shows the figures reversed.² In the oil Saint George's



Edward Burne-Jones, *Saint George and the Dragon*, ca. 1865. Black chalk, heightened with white, on brown paper, 14¹/₂ x 18 in. (37 x 45.8 cm). Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery

armor is again of burnished black, inevitably echoing the depiction of Carpaccio's *Saint George and the Dragon* (ca. 1502–8) in the Scuola di San Giorgio, Venice, of which Burne-Jones had made a copy on his visit in 1862.³

The oil painting, quite heavily reworked, is now in the Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney.⁴ A watercolor version of the main image of *Saint George and the Dragon* was painted in 1868 (William Morris Gallery, Walthamstow); in it, the figure of the princess, tied to a stake, appears in the middle distance.⁵

1. *Memorials*, vol. 1, pp. 296–97. The passage continues: "It was seldom that his own family asked him any questions about his work as he did it, for we saw how little he liked to talk of a thing before it was done, and realised what would be the irksomeness to him of anything like a running commentary on it."

2. Birmingham collection 1939, p. 72 (12'04); Art Services International 1995–96, no. 80.

3. Musée des Beaux-Arts de Nantes 1992, no. 3.

4. Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna 1986, no. 15.

5. Reproduced in Harrison and Waters 1973, pl. 13.

36.

Saint George and the Dragon: The Return of the Princess

1865–66

Pencil, 13 1/8 x 16 1/4 in. (33.2 x 42.4 cm)

Signed: E. Burne Jones

PROVENANCE: Edward Poynter; bequeathed by Cecil French, 1954

EXHIBITED: Arts Council 1975–76, no. 92

Trustees of the British Museum (1954–5–8–14)

BIRMINGHAM ONLY

So as it drew to ending of the day,
Unto the city did they take their way.

.
So through the streets they went, and quickly spread
News that the terror of the land was dead.
And folk thronged round to see the twain go by,
Or went before with flowers and minstrelsy,
Rejoicing for the slaying of their shame.

As befits the climactic scene, this is the most elaborate of the series, Burne-Jones giving a greater sense of spatial recession and movement by blending foreground and background figures. A number of fine drawings for the female musicians, from among those at Birmingham, include studies not only of the nude figure and of the fall of drapery, but also of hands, arms, and feet. They reveal the artist's ability to accommodate remarkable variation within the pose and grouping of figures, a skill that was beginning to tax his ingenuity in the design of stained glass for the Morris firm.

It is therefore not surprising to find, by this date, correspondences of pictures and cartoons, such as here between the piping female figures and the genus of trumpeting angels; such parallels are most apparent in the three-light window at Saint Edward's Church, Cheddleton, Staffordshire, designed in 1869. The young woman scattering flowers was similarly translated into an independent painting under the title *Flora* (private collection), begun in 1868. The oil painting *The Return of the Princess* is now in the Bristol City Art Gallery.



A New Voice

Ruskin's "serious talk," however important, was only one of a number of influences that Burne-Jones experienced in the 1860s, diverse in character but complementary in effect. Now in his thirties, the artist was facing an increasing number of personal and professional responsibilities. During the early years of their married life, he and Georgie continued to live in Bloomsbury. Having briefly occupied the rooms in Russell Place that had been his last bachelor establishment, they took a larger apartment at 62 Great Russell Street, overlooking the forecourt of the British Museum, in 1861. A son, Philip (1861–1926), was born shortly after the move, and they remained there until the winter of 1864, when a domestic crisis struck them, Georgie catching scarlet fever and losing her second child. Eager to put unhappy memories behind them, they then moved to 41 Kensington Square, on the other side of London. In this they were playing their part in the general drift westward that characterized the Victorian art world at this period. Indeed, they were probably influenced by the fact that their friends Val Prinsep and Frederic Leighton (1830–1896), the future president of the Royal Academy, were currently building themselves studio houses not far away in Holland Park Road, thus pioneering the artists' colony that was to establish itself in the area during the next decade. The Burne-Joneses' last child, Margaret (1866–1953; cat. no. 117), was born in 1866, and the following year they moved west again, settling at The Grange, North End Lane, Fulham (fig. 68), a roomy eighteenth-century house set in a large garden, that had once belonged to the novelist Samuel Richardson. Still in a largely rural area but one that would soon see intense development, it was to remain the family's London home until Burne-Jones's death thirty-one years later.

"When we turned to look around us," Georgie wrote of the move to Kensington Square, "something was gone, something had been left behind—and it was our first youth."¹ For all the circle it was a time of change. Rossetti had been established on Cheyne Walk (another move west) since October 1862, adopting a more professional attitude to work and enjoying consequent success. Madox Brown achieved temporary prosperity following his one-man exhibition in the spring of 1865,

and the same year Swinburne made his name with the publication of *Atalanta in Calydon*, gaining further fame of a more dubious kind when *Poems and Ballads* appeared in 1866. In the autumn of 1865 Morris and his family moved from Red House to London so that he could be closer to the firm, and from then on he too was preoccupied with the work that would bring him fame as a poet, *The Earthly Paradise*.

Burne-Jones's own reputation was growing fast. His work attracted much attention and fetched good prices when the Plint collection was sold at Christie's in March 1862. The Hogarth Club had closed the previous December, and in order to reach a wider audience he sought election to the Old Water-Colour Society (OWCS) in 1863. Unsuccessful at the first attempt, he was elected an Associate in 1864, together with the Pre-Raphaelite landscape artist G. P. Boyce and the popular illustrator Fred Walker. That summer he showed four recent works, including *The Merciful Knight* (cat. no. 26) and *Cinderella* (cat. no. 22), and for the next six years all his major watercolors and many of his drawings were to appear at the Society's twice-yearly shows.

Within the Society he was never made welcome, facing hostility from conservative adherents of the English watercolor tradition who could not come to terms with his radically



Figure 68. The Grange, North End Lane, Fulham

different approach. The press too was generally antagonistic; many years later Harry Quilter, a former art critic for the *Times*, recalled “the utter scorn and blame” that were “showered” on Burne-Jones’s work at the OWCS.² “We know not,” wrote the critic for the *Art Journal* on the artist’s first appearance, “what spectacles [Mr Jones] can have put on to have gained a vision so astounding . . . but to those who believe . . . that truth is beauty, and beauty is truth, forms such as these are absolutely abhorrent.”³ Familiarity did not bring enlightenment. Five years later, when the artist showed *The Wine of Circe* (fig. 24), regarded by many at the time as his finest work to date, the same critic found the picture “supremely disagreeable,” “studiously offensive,” and the product of a “diseased imagination.”⁴ And he was by no means alone. “No amount of talking shall ever persuade us,” wrote Tom Taylor in the *Times* in 1867, “that such [works] . . . are other than atrocities in art, exemplifying almost every fault of conception and execution that pictures can have, and challenging criticism by the obtrusiveness with which ugliness is thrust upon us for beauty, deformity for grace, exaggeration for expression, and garishness or dirt for colour.”⁵ This was the year that Burne-Jones was showing *Saint Theophilus* (fig. 66). No wonder Ruskin told his audience that he was an artist whose work was “mocked and despised” while that of Gustave Doré, the loathsome exponent of “dramatic excitement,” had been “received with a shout of devotional enthusiasm.”⁶

But there was some appreciation. F. G. Stephens, a member of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood back in 1848 who had abandoned his brush and was now art critic of the *Athenaeum*, was generally sympathetic, and even the most hostile critics never failed to discuss the pictures at length, thus acknowledging in spite of themselves that a new force had entered British art. It was generally agreed, moreover, that for all his faults Burne-Jones was an exquisite colorist and could express a particular kind of poetry and romance with unusual intensity. This alone, the *Times* predicted in 1864, would give him a certain popularity, since “minds as steeped in medievalism or as prone to relish it as the artist himself . . . are numerous enough now-a-days to constitute a public of their own.”⁷

This proved to be the case. Far more than Rossetti, whose work remained almost unknown outside his circle because of his refusal to exhibit, Burne-Jones began to be seen as the leader of a new school. He had gained his first follower as early as 1857, casting his spell over Spencer Stanhope, who was actually four years his senior, when they were working side by side at the Oxford Union. Now he attracted a group of younger men, some, like Henry Holiday (1839–1927), William De Morgan (1839–1917), and Walter Crane (1845–1915), who were to become well-known artists themselves, others—Robert Bateman (1842–1922), Edward Clifford (1844–1907),

Henry Ellis Wooldridge (1845–1917), Alfred Sacheverell Coke (fl. 1869–92), Theodore Blake Wirgman (1848–1925), Edward Henry Fahey (1844–1907)—who are now more shadowy figures, although each is of interest in his way. Several were students of the Royal Academy Schools who met their hero through Simeon Solomon (1840–1905), himself a product of the Schools and a friend of Burne-Jones, who greatly admired his work. Teaching at the Schools was very uninspired at this date, and the young men easily fell victim to Burne-Jones’s emotive art. As Crane later recalled, no doubt thinking particularly of *The Merciful Knight* (cat. no. 26), “The curtain had been lifted, and we had had a glimpse into a magic world of romance and pictured poetry, peopled with ghosts of ‘ladies dead and lovely knights,’—a twilight world of dark mysterious woodlands, haunted streams, meads of deep green starred with burning flowers, veiled in a dim and mystic light.”⁸ It is no accident that Crane emphasizes the landscape settings of Burne-Jones’s pictures. Burne-Jones’s approach to landscape was highly original at this date, and several of his followers, including Crane, developed this peripheral aspect of his work by painting landscapes charged with poetic feeling.

During the mid-1860s Burne-Jones not only gained followers but extended his range of patrons. Fellow artists, including Morris, Street, and Boyce, had long owned examples of his work. To these were now added Frederic Leighton, who bought pictures in 1864 and 1865, and Myles Birket Foster (1825–1899), one of Burne-Jones’s few allies in the OWCS, who commissioned the Saint George series (cat. nos. 31, 33, 34) as part of the decoration of The Hill, his new house at Witley in Surrey, which was in the hands of the Morris firm. George Howard, later 9th Earl of Carlisle (1843–1911), was both a fellow artist and a patron in a more conventional sense. Determined to become an artist despite his aristocratic background, he met Burne-Jones in 1865 and received some lessons from him before moving on to Alphonse Legros. He acquired a few early paintings by Burne-Jones and would later commission major works both for his London house in Palace Green (cat. no. 104) and for two of his country seats, Castle Howard in Yorkshire and Naworth Castle in Cumbria (cat. no. 132).

But the most important patrons Burne-Jones gained at this time were the Liverpool shipowner F. R. Leyland (fig. 69) and the wealthy India merchant William Graham (fig. 70), who had just entered Parliament as Liberal member for Glasgow. Both, according to Georgie, “seemed to make up their minds about his work” on seeing it at the OWCS,⁹ and each was to acquire some of his greatest paintings in the years ahead. Indeed, Burne-Jones would never have keener or more sympathetic patrons than Leyland and Graham. They were also staunch supporters of Rossetti and other Pre-Raphaelites, as well as

ardent collectors of early Italian pictures, being well aware of the obvious parallels. There, however, the resemblance ceased. Graham, who was fifteen years older than Burne-Jones, was the more attractive character. Perhaps surprisingly, in view of his strict evangelical faith, he had a deep and instinctive feeling for painting, as Gladstone recognized when he made him a Trustee of the National Gallery. Although he owned many pictures of great importance, both by old and modern masters, he was equally drawn to the small, unassuming work if he felt it had some special quality. Burne-Jones was once deeply touched when Graham actually kissed a passage in one of his pictures that particularly appealed to him. Characteristically, Graham would sometimes acquire a painting in both small and large versions (cat. nos. 30, 84), and he had a special fondness for the Giorgionesque compositions that Burne-Jones was painting in the early 1860s. It was largely due to Graham that this element persisted in his work long after he had outgrown his Venetian phase, appearing at its strongest in *Le Chant d'Amour* (cat. no. 84) and *Laus Veneris* (cat. no. 63), both exhibited in 1878, and only slightly less dominant in the Briar Rose paintings (cat. nos. 55–58), of which the main versions were not completed until 1890. All these were either owned by or at some stage destined for Graham.

Frederick Leyland, who was only two years older than Burne-Jones, was a collector of a very different type. He too had a genuine feeling for painting, and was as well a talented pianist, but he was also a ruthless self-made businessman, masking his humble origins behind a chilling reserve, and he liked his pictures to be large set pieces which served partly as status symbols. It was typical that his first purchases from Burne-Jones were *The Wine of Circe* (fig. 24), *Phyllis and Demophoön* (cat. no. 48), and a set of the Seasons (private collection), all of which were among the artist's most impressive works of the late 1860s. Leyland had begun his career as a collector by buying conventional works of the day. It was Rossetti who directed his energies into more adventurous channels, and he remained heavily dependent on the advice of artists and men of taste. If this was very different from Graham's self-reliant and intuitional approach, so was Leyland's sense of display. Graham loved pictures for their own sake, and at his house in Grosvenor Place they lined the walls, sat about on chairs and tables, or stood in ranks on the floor. Leyland, on the other hand, saw his pictures as part of a decorative ensemble, for which they would often be specially commissioned. He was to create two great Aesthetic interiors in the Knightsbridge area, at 22 Queen's Gate from 1868 and at 49 Prince's Gate from 1874, thus realizing his dream of living "the life of an old Venetian merchant in modern London."¹⁰

In addition to his obligations to a growing family, followers, and patrons, Burne-Jones was having to supply Morris

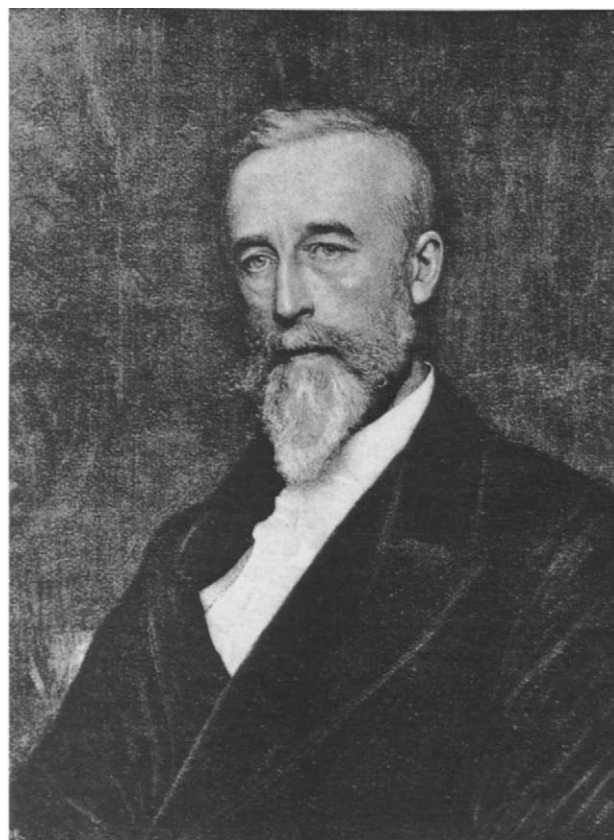


Figure 69. Frederick Richards Leyland (1831–1892). From a portrait by Val Prinsep (1838–1904), the sitter's son-in-law, reproduced in the *Art Journal*, 1892

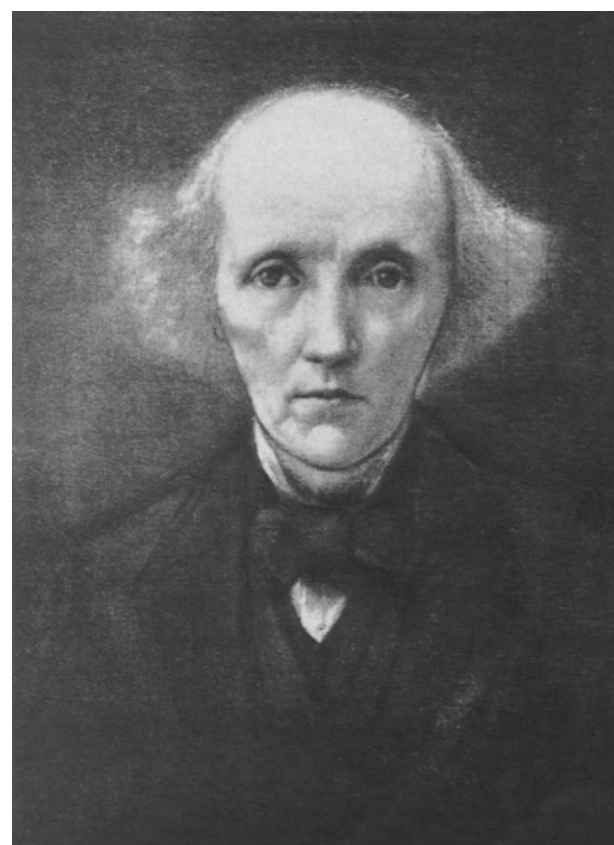


Figure 70. William Graham (1818–1885). From an unfinished portrait by Edward Burne-Jones, published in Frances Horner, *Time Remembered* (1933)



Figure 71. Charles Fairfax Murray (1849–1919). From a photograph of ca. 1910, published in A. C. Benson, *Memories and Friends* (1924)

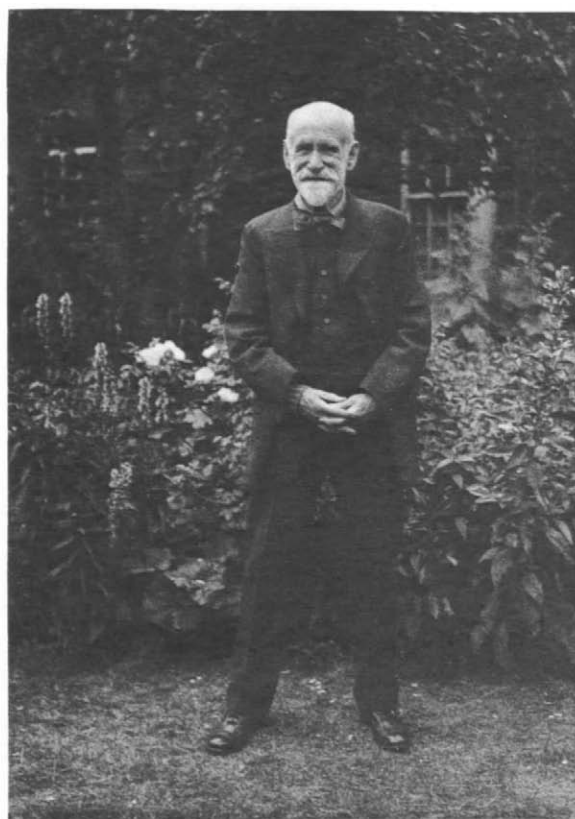


Figure 72. Thomas Matthews Rooke (1842–1942)

with an increasing number of decorative designs, mainly stained-glass cartoons. Following its successful showing at the International Exhibition in 1862, where both its stands won medals, the firm's work had expanded dramatically. Morris was now back in London, living over the workshops established in Queen Square, Bloomsbury, and a young and energetic manager, George Warrington Taylor, had been appointed to put the business on a sound financial footing. Here, as in so many related areas, amateurishness was no longer viable. At the same time, although other partners continued to produce designs, Rossetti until 1864, Madox Brown and Morris himself until well into the early 1870s, it was soon clear that Burne-Jones was destined to be the firm's principal supplier. His style was so suited to decorative design, and he possessed such phenomenal powers of invention.

That inventiveness itself was a driving force, as Charles Eliot Norton realized when he described *The Grange* in 1869. "Burne-Jones's studio," he wrote, "is a large room on the garden side of the house. There is a pleasant look of work about it, and a general air of appropriate disorder. All round the wall, upon the floor, and on easels, lie and stand sketches or pictures in every stage of existence. Jones's lively imagination is continually designing more than he can execute. His fancy creates a hundred pictures for one that his hand can paint. It

keeps him awake night after night with its animated suggestions, and each morning he covers the canvas with the outline of a new picture." Norton also noted "three or four enormous volumes filled with studies of every sort," all of them "full of exquisite feeling and grace."¹¹

With such pressure of work, it was hardly surprising that Burne-Jones began to employ assistants. The first was Charles Fairfax Murray (fig. 71), who was taken on in November 1866 to help with the *Saint George* series and soon graduated to other tasks. Not a strikingly original talent but a brilliant executant, Murray was ideal in this role. Indeed he was in much demand, also assisting Rossetti and Watts, working as a stained-glass painter for Morris, and copying Old Masters for Ruskin. In Burne-Jones's studio he was followed by T. M. Rooke (fig. 72), who arrived in 1869 and was still employed there when Burne-Jones died in 1898, and for shorter periods by others, including J. M. Strudwick (1849–1937), Matthew Webb (ca. 1851–1924), and Francis Lathrop (1849–1909), a nephew of Nathaniel Hawthorne who later returned to America, where he practiced as a decorative artist. Harry Quilter claimed that Henry Holiday "used to work as an assistant"¹² and Walter Crane certainly played a large part in completing the *Cupid and Psyche* frieze (cat. nos. 40a–l). According to Holman Hunt, "Burne-Jones often had at work as many as

twenty [assistants] at a time,"¹³ and although this may be a gross exaggeration, it suggests the scale, productivity, and sophisticated nature of the operation.

With the revival of interest in Burne-Jones and the phenomenal rise in his pictures' prices, much argument has been expended on the degree to which a given work shows studio intervention. The question is often difficult to answer, since he is not an artist with an easily recognizable gestural style. Indeed in a sense it is irrelevant, since he clearly saw himself as the head of a Renaissance-type workshop, with the emphasis on design rather than execution. If the composition was his, it was "his" picture, even if the workmanship was partly by another hand. Rooke summed up this approach when he wrote that Burne-Jones's "cherished idea" was "to get much done by means of a 'school' of artists and assistants" trained by himself.¹⁴

Nonetheless, Burne-Jones did discriminate between "autograph" and "studio" works, as George Howard, who saw his practice at close quarters, recalled. "The pictures that issued from that studio," he wrote, "may be divided into three classes. In the first, there were pictures that were entirely the work of the master himself. In another group, there were pictures which he had begun and to which he had added some finishing touches, after a great part of the actual painting had been done by another hand. Finally, there were pictures for which the master had provided some preliminary sketches but which had been executed entirely by one of Burne-Jones's coadjutors, who had, as a matter of course, set himself to learn and to imitate those details of form that helped to make the master's personal style."¹⁵

It was inevitable that that "style" should change as Burne-Jones responded to his new obligations. Small, "demanding" pictures, intense in mood, dark in tone, and dubious in drawing, gave way to larger works that were in every sense "easier"—sweeter in feeling, technically more competent, lighter in color, and more decorative. Oil had always been considered superior to watercolor in the hierarchy of techniques, and Rossetti used it increasingly as an integral part of his new-found professionalism. Burne-Jones was slower off the mark, but from the Saint George series (cat. nos. 31, 33, 34) onward oil claimed his attention as much as watercolor. In fact, there was now very little difference in the way he handled the two media. In both cases he would model the forms with stiff white bodycolor, glaze them, and then repeat the process—refining the forms with bodycolor and the tones by glazing—until the picture was finished.¹⁶ The large amount of bodycolor used in their production is what gives many watercolors of this period their pale and chalky effect (cat. nos. 30, 44).

It is not hard to see how Burne-Jones's professional commitments dovetailed with Ruskin's more theoretical demands that he should jettison "Dantesque visionariness," paint

"beautiful things" for their social efficacy, and use clear colors for their moral and symbolic significance. Watts's insistence that Burne-Jones must "draw better" would also have gained meaning in the light of his ever-growing workload, the expectations of patrons and followers, and the strictures of a hostile press. The most common criticism made of his work at the OWCS was that it was badly drawn. Tom Taylor had much to say of his "anatomical eccentricities";¹⁷ and even F. G. Stephens hammered away at this weakness. Having praised the "wonderful colour" of *Green Summer* (fig. 63), shown in 1865, he added that the artist "degraded his powers" as a colorist by his "bad drawing."¹⁸ It is no accident that an unprecedented number of preparatory studies exist for such paintings as the Saint George series, *Saint Theophilus and the Angel* (fig. 66), *The Wine of Circe* (fig. 24), and *The Lament* (cat. no. 44). They bear out Georgie's comment that the late 1860s were "a self-absorbed time . . . Edward setting himself hard to make up for lack of earlier training."¹⁹

In addition to these pressures, Burne-Jones must have been acutely aware that he faced competition from a group of young artists who had settled in London in the late 1850s and early 1860s after training abroad in the European academic tradition. Frederic Leighton had enjoyed exhaustive study in almost every Continental capital and artistic center. Edward Poynter, Thomas Armstrong (1835–1911), and the American James Abbott McNeill Whistler (1834–1903) had all studied under Charles Gleyre (1806–1874), forming part of the so-called Paris Gang that another fellow student, George du Maurier, was to immortalize in his novel *Trilby* (1894). Albert Moore (1841–1893), although he received his training at the Royal Academy Schools, found his feet as an artist only after a formative stay in Rome in the winter of 1862–63. All these artists were attracted to idealist or narrative figure subjects, and their integration with the indigenous Pre-Raphaelites gives an extraordinary complexity to this field in the 1860s. Everyone seems to be caught up in a bewildering web of crosscurrents, out of which the pattern established in the last quarter of the century only gradually emerges.

The social background is important. Leighton, whom we have already encountered buying Burne-Jones's pictures and settling near him in Kensington, was a member of the Hogarth Club. Those who liked to play host to the art world—Sara Prinsep, Alexander Ionides, the silk mercer Arthur Lewis—provided many opportunities for meeting and communication. Albert Moore was a friend of Burne-Jones's associates Simeon Solomon and Henry Holiday, all three having been members of a sketching club when they were Royal Academy students. Burne-Jones met Whistler in July 1862, when they both dined with Swinburne, Boyce, and Rossetti,²⁰ who was to strike up a close friendship with Whistler when

the American settled in Chelsea later that year. Poynter became Burne-Jones's brother-in-law in 1866, marrying Georgie's sister Agnes.

More significant still were the professional projects which brought together artists from both traditions—the decoration of William Burges's painted furniture, the restoration of Waltham Abbey, the furnishing of Lyndhurst church, the Dalziels' illustrated Bible. Moore and Solomon provided Morris with cartoons for stained glass about 1864, and many were associated with the decorative schemes orchestrated by Murray Marks (1840–1918) and Charles Augustus Howell (1840–1890). These enterprising *marchands amateurs* advised George Howard, the publisher F. S. Ellis, and the Ionides and their many connections in the Anglo-Greek community. But their greatest triumph was the decoration of F. R. Leyland's London houses, to which Rossetti, Burne-Jones, Whistler, and Moore all made major contributions. In 1868, with the financial backing of the younger Alexander Ionides, Marks and Howell planned to launch an “art firm” which would commission works of art specifically for furnishing purposes.²¹ The idea fizzled out, but not before Burne-Jones had painted several pictures for the firm and Whistler had allowed it to handle the sale of his etchings.

To speak of such schemes is to acknowledge the advent of the Aesthetic movement, with its belief, revolutionary in the Victorian context, that art is concerned primarily with formal rather than with narrative or moral values. Swinburne expressed the new ideal when, in reviewing the Royal Academy exhibition of 1868, he described a picture by Albert Moore as “to artists what the verse of Théophile Gautier is to poets, the faultless and secure expression of an exclusive worship of things formally beautiful.”²² By 1871 it had filtered down to the more popular level of a review in the *Art Journal*. “Since Pre-Raphaelitism has gone out of fashion,” its critic observed, again in connection with an RA exhibition, “a new [and] select . . . school has been formed by a few choice spirits. . . . The brotherhood cherish in common reverence for the antique . . . ; they affect southern climes’ . . . [and] a certain *dolce far niente* style, with a general Sybarite state of mind which rests in art and aestheticism as the be-all and end-all of existence. . . . [The] new school stands [in relation] not to Greece only, but likewise to Japan. . . . Taken as a whole, it may be accepted as a timely protest against the vulgar naturalism, the common realism, which is applauded by the uneducated multitudes who throng our London exhibitions.”²³

This passage is a valuable point of reference. It not only stresses that the salient feature of Aestheticism is a belief in beauty as an end in itself, recognizes that it has superseded Pre-Raphaelitism, and is inevitably exclusive in character, but it identifies two of its principal sources. “Reverence for the



Figure 73. Maria Zambaco (1843–1914). From a photograph by Frederick Hollyer (1837–1933) of a drawing by Edward Burne-Jones dated 1870

antique” was crucially important. Indeed, late Victorian classicism was to grow out of the movement, whether it retained an “aesthetic” purity in the deliberately restricted art of Albert Moore, assumed the more theatrical and upholstered mode preferred by Leighton, found itself the vehicle of Watts’s high-minded forays into allegory and symbolism, or flourished at the level of historical narrative and sentimental anecdote in the hands of Poynter and Lawrence Alma-Tadema (1836–1912), the Dutchman who settled in London in 1870 and became, like so many of these artists, a friend of Burne-Jones. The real nature of this phenomenon is still open to debate. It has been seen by some as a “Victorian High Renaissance,”²⁴ while others have argued that it was a “final manifestation” of Neoclassicism.²⁵ In a sense it was both. Late Renaissance influence was certainly important, but there were also links with the early nineteenth century. If many of the protagonists had been trained in a tradition going back to David and his German equivalents, Watts’s devotion to the Elgin Marbles was rooted in the great controversy over their merits between the historical painter Benjamin Robert Haydon and the doyen of eighteenth-century academic classicism, Richard Payne Knight.

Aestheticism was nothing if not eclectic, and the *Art Journal* was right to note that Japanese art was another vital

ingredient. Perhaps the only major aspect of the movement that the article failed to mention was the principle that painting was analogous to music, both being essentially abstract in character. This idea had long been current in France, thanks to such theorists as Gautier and Baudelaire, but it was not to find its classic statement in England until Walter Pater (1839–1894) expressed it in his essay “The School of Giorgione,” published in the *Fortnightly Review* in 1877 but possibly written much earlier. “Art, . . .” he claimed, “is . . . always striving . . . to become a matter of pure perception, to get rid of its responsibilities to its subject or material; . . . [and] it is the art of music which most completely realises this artistic ideal, this perfect identification of form and matter. . . . Therefore, to the condition of its perfect moments, all the arts may be supposed constantly to tend and aspire. Music . . . is the true type or measure of perfected art.”²⁶

No one remained immune to the developments of the 1860s. Artists who eventually emerged as thoroughgoing classicists had an early brush with Pre-Raphaelitism or flirted with the Venetian style, which acted as a sort of buffer between medievalism and classicism. As for the Pre-Raphaelites, even Madox Brown, the great student of character, or that inveterate moralizer Holman Hunt, made essays in the Aesthetic style. Rossetti was profoundly affected. There are works of the early 1860s in which he treats classical themes or adopts a motif because “the Greeks used to do it.”²⁷ Other pictures were frankly decorative in purpose, like the sumptuous *Monna Vanna* of 1866 (Tate Gallery, London), which he thought “probably the most effective as a room decoration which I have ever painted.”²⁸

But if anyone stood at the center of the vortex, it was Burne-Jones. Steeped in the Pre-Raphaelite tradition and the focus of Ruskin’s attempt to reestablish this as he conceived it, he was nonetheless acutely aware of the values of what the

Art Journal called the “new and select school.” There is even a certain irony in the picture of him caught between Ruskin’s symbol-laden moralizing and the consciously amoral stance of Aestheticism. It is important to remember that he was closer in age to the newcomers than to the established Pre-Raphaelites. Madox Brown was twelve years his senior, Holman Hunt six, and Rossetti five, while Leighton was only three years older, and Poynter, Armstrong, Whistler, and Moore were all somewhat younger, Whistler by no more than a year. Burne-Jones’s centrality is underlined by the way in which Aesthetic tendencies took a more obvious and effortless form in his younger associates and followers. Walter Crane, through his book illustrations, was to become the great popularizer of Aesthetic imagery, while Simeon Solomon proved a tragic victim of the movement’s avowed paganism, his career collapsing when he was arrested for homosexual offenses in 1873. Meanwhile, his work had much in common with that of Burne-Jones. His soulful faces are particularly reminiscent and, although undoubtedly a shade more decadent, are similarly indebted to Leonardesque prototypes, studied in his case in Florence in 1866. Many of Burne-Jones’s followers exhibited at the Dudley Gallery, which opened in Piccadilly in 1865 and became something of a nursery to the younger Aesthetic generation. Critics attacked them as savagely as they did their leader, dubbing them the Poetry without Grammar School because they too were felt to be deficient in drawing.

Like everyone else, Burne-Jones was touched by the prevailing classicism. Just as his sketchbooks of the mid-1860s reflect his awakening interest in early Renaissance painting, so they show him copying from the antique in the British Museum.²⁹ The fact that he lived opposite the museum’s entrance until the end of 1864 made study there all the easier, although there is evidence that he continued to draw at



Figure 74. Albert Moore (1841–1893), *The Marble Seat*, 1865. Oil on canvas, 18½ x 29 in. (47 x 73.7 cm). From a photograph published in A. L. Baldry, *Albert Moore: His Life and Works* (1894)

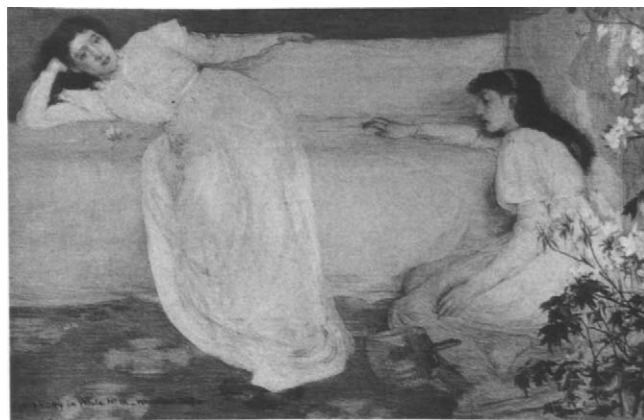


Figure 75. James Abbott McNeill Whistler (1834–1903), *Symphony in White, No. 3*, 1865–67. Oil on canvas, 20¼ x 30⅞ in. (51.5 x 76.8 cm). Barber Institute of Fine Arts, University of Birmingham

the museum after he moved to Kensington. It is no accident that many of the copies are taken from the Elgin Marbles, for behind them lie not only the legacy of European Neoclassicism but those two Ruskinian concepts to which the Marbles were integral—the classical tradition in Western art and the moral values implicit in “classical grace and tranquillity.”

Other influences were also at work. Leighton, Poynter, and Alma-Tadema were all to possess great knowledge of the ancient world, but no one was a better classical scholar than Burne-Jones. “His love of the classics made him the best scholar I have ever known,” wrote his friend Luke Ionides. “It influenced his art a great deal.”³⁰

Above all, there were the powerful forces unleashed by his liaison with Maria Zambaco (1843–1914; fig. 73). This episode—naturally not mentioned by Georgie in her biography but now well known—was the emotional climax of Burne-Jones’s life. Wayward and headstrong, artistically talented, and ravishingly beautiful, Maria was a cousin of the Ionides. Born Maria Cassavetti in 1843, she had married Demetrius Zambaco, the doctor to the Greek community in Paris, in 1861, and borne him two children. In 1866, however, she had left him and returned with the children to London, where, at the age of twenty-three, she was introduced to Burne-Jones, her senior by ten years. It is not hard to see why he was swept off his feet by this passionate and elemental creature, with her “glorious red hair,” her “almost phosphorescent white skin,”³¹ and her mysterious, well-like eyes (cat. no. 49). There could not have been a greater contrast to Georgie, either in looks or in temperament. Indeed nothing in his life hitherto—his provincial middle-class childhood, the earnest soul-searching years at Oxford, or the happy but hardworking decade in London, still haunted by Ruskinian ideology—had remotely prepared him for this devastating experience. The emotional turmoil put a severe strain on his health, and the affair reached a bizarre climax in January 1869, when Maria tried to commit suicide in the Regent’s Canal. Restrained by her lover, she failed, and the relationship continued, if not at such a pitch of ardor, well into the early 1870s. Some suspected that it went on even longer.³²

During their liaison Maria posed for many of Burne-Jones’s paintings, usually ones, such as *Phyllis and Demophoön* (cat. no. 48), *Love among the Ruins* (1870–73; private collection), and *The Beguiling of Merlin* (cat. no. 64), in which it is easy to read some autobiographical reference. Even her appearance as Circe (fig. 24) seems significant, the heroine being both a destroyer (in conventional mythology) and a “nourisher” (in Ruskin’s variant) of men. Yet it is no accident that *The Wine of Circe* and *Phyllis and Demophoön* are also among Burne-Jones’s most classical conceptions. Maria can only have intensified his response to the nascent classicism, represent-

ing a living embodiment of the Greek ideal he had come to seek in his paintings.

Burne-Jones’s most purely classical work is *The Lament* (cat. no. 44), a watercolor of 1865–66. The composition, the mood of restrained sadness, and the sense of low relief conveyed by the pale colors all create an effect reminiscent of a Greek stela or tombstone. In fact, with the aid of a sketchbook copy and preparatory drawings, a direct link can be established with part of the Elgin frieze.

The picture also marks the point at which Burne-Jones comes closest to Albert Moore and Whistler, the two artists in the classical spectrum with whom stylistically he has most in common. Moore and Whistler had met in 1865, formed a close friendship, and were currently developing their work along similar lines. Both were seeking to create an art that had no narrative content, no “responsibility to subject,” as Pater would put it, making its impact purely in terms of harmonious composition and color harmony, with Greek sculpture and Japanese prints as the principal visual sources. As is often noted, *The Lament* is very comparable to Albert Moore’s painting *The Marble Seat* (fig. 74), his first fully Aesthetic work, exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1865, while Whistler’s *Symphony in White, No. 3* (fig. 75), begun in 1865 and shown at the Academy two years later, is hardly less of a parallel. The three pictures are contemporary, all show ideal and almost subjectless figure groups inspired to a greater or lesser extent by the Elgin frieze, and although *The Marble Seat* is now lost and known only from an old photograph, there is little doubt that, like the others, it represented a color harmony in a light key. The relationship extends even to the way in which both Burne-Jones and Whistler introduce sprays of blossom at the right of their pictures for compositional and chromatic purposes. Whistler’s use of this motif, like his introduction of a fan in the foreground, reflects his passion for Far Eastern art, which had been gathering momentum since 1862, when he had seen Japanese artifacts at the International Exhibition in London. Burne-Jones too may have had such sources in mind since, according to Luke Ionides, he, like Whistler, was “a great admirer of Japanese art.”³³ There is another hint of this in the blue-and-white plates on the dresser in *Cinderella* (cat. no. 22), a watercolor of 1863, although these were probably the ordinary English willow-pattern plates that were in fashion among the Pre-Raphaelites a few years earlier, paving the way for the collecting of blue-and-white Chinese porcelain by Rossetti, Whistler, and others who were setting the Aesthetic agenda.³⁴

As this implies, the question of initiative here is far from simple. Because Burne-Jones would always be a more narrative artist than either Whistler or Moore (even in a picture like *The Lament*), it is easy to assume that the more progressive

ideas originated with them. This, however, is not necessarily the case. Long before Moore exhibited *The Marble Seat*, Burne-Jones had been experimenting with “subjectless” compositions, even if they were Giorgionesque rather than classical in style (cat. no. 63; fig. 30). Richard Dorment has also suggested that Whistler’s famous Six Projects of 1867–68 (fig. 76) owe a debt to the Saint George series (cat. nos. 31, 33, 34).³⁵ Painted as sketches for a series of pictures commissioned by Leyland, the Projects were in the full Aesthetic style, each showing an abstract figure group harmoniously composed, delicately colored, and once again betraying every awareness of Greek and Japanese sources. Dorment argues that the frames of the finished paintings would have been decorated with bars of music to emphasize the absence of subject, and that this would have been particularly appropriate to a commission for a patron as dedicated to music as Leyland. It is interesting that the Projects were actually painted in Burne-Jones’s old studio at 62 Great Russell Street, but this is perhaps no more than a coincidence. The real point is that in 1867, the year in which he wrote to his friend Henri Fantin-Latour regretting that he had ever been inspired by Courbet and wishing that he had instead been a pupil of Ingres, Whistler still had much to learn from Burne-Jones’s set of paintings. Like the Projects, they are a decorative cycle, intended to hang round a room, and they clearly echo the Parthenon friezes in the processional arrangement of the figures. Moreover, although Dorment is correct in noting that Whistler painted his sketches “in a range of colours undreamt of by Burne-Jones,” there is in fact a hint of a pale color harmony in the Saint George paintings in the way the figures of the princess and her maidens provide recurring notes of white.

Whistler, it is true, was no stranger to such color schemes, having painted his famous picture *The White Girl* (National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.) as early as 1862. But it seems that only in 1867 did he begin to make the point about an analogy with music by calling some of his pictures “symphonies,” while his use of other musical terms—“harmony,” “nocturne,” “arrangement,” “variation”—is later still. Burne-Jones, on the other hand, seems to have arrived at the idea some years earlier. In their reminiscences the wood engravers George and Edward Dalziel record commissioning a watercolor from him in the early 1860s. “About this time,” they wrote, “he had painted a picture, ‘A Harmony in Blue,’ for John Ruskin, and it was suggested that ours should be ‘A Harmony in Red.’ After some months the result was a most highly elaborated watercolour, ‘The Annunciation.’”³⁶ This cannot have been later than 1862 since the “Harmony in Blue,” a Venetian half-length entitled *Viridis of Milan* (private collection), was painted in 1861 and the Dalziels’ *Annunciation* (cat. no. 27) in 1863. Burne-Jones went on to paint other “harmonies,” *The*



Figure 76. James Abbott McNeill Whistler (1834–1903), *Symphony in Blue and Pink*, 1867–68. Oil on board, 18 $\frac{3}{8}$ x 24 $\frac{3}{4}$ in. (46.7 x 61.9 cm). One of the Six Projects painted for F. R. Leyland. Freer Gallery of Art, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.



Figure 77. The Green Dining Room, South Kensington (now Victoria and Albert) Museum, London. Designed by Philip Webb (1831–1915) and decorated by Morris, Marshall, Faulkner & Co., 1866–67

Wine of Circe (fig. 24), begun in 1863, being a “harmony in yellow,” and *Green Summer* (fig. 63), painted 1864, a “harmony in green.”

Perhaps Rossetti was the true instigator of these experiments. His *Annunciation* (Tate Gallery, London), a major early work of 1850, had been effectively a “harmony in white,” although it was not until 1865 that he painted *Fanny Cornforth* (Barber Institute of Fine Arts, University of Birmingham) in “an oil-picture all blue”³⁷ or until 1872 that he conceived *Veronica Veronese* (Delaware Art Museum, Wilmington) as “a study of varied greens.”³⁸ It is also interesting that, according to the Dalziels, Burne-Jones’s “harmony in blue” had been painted for Ruskin, especially as the picture in question was

an essay in "Venetian" values. The commission may well relate to Ruskin's study of Titian's female portraits in Germany in 1858–59, when he paid close attention to their colors, as well as to some remarkable but seldom noticed passages in his writings of about this date, in which he seeks to convey pictorial values in musical terms. The link is perhaps to be found in Burne-Jones's copy of Titian's *La Bella*, made at the Pitti in 1859, on which he noted that the sitter wears a rich blue velvet dress.

Once again one is struck by the correspondence between what Ruskin was saying and the priorities of the Aesthetic movement. Indeed, the two meet not only in the concept of color harmonies. Ruskin's insistence that Burne-Jones should use paler tones because of their symbolic value also found an echo in the light color schemes favored for Aesthetic interiors. The white dresses in the Saint George paintings, which Birket Foster hung in a room displaying numerous blue-and-white pots, and the pearly tones of the Six Projects destined for Leyland's house in Queen's Gate, have already been noted. Equally characteristic of the Leyland scheme were the delicately hued figures of standing girls contributed by Moore; *The Wine of Circe* (fig. 24), in which the dominant colors are yellow, white, and pale blue, offset by touches of black; and the set of Seasons (private collection) that Burne-Jones painted for his patron in 1869–70, Maria Zambaco posing in the lightest of diaphanous drapery for *Summer*. These were linked both chromatically and in terms of theme. "There is a plan throughout," Burne-Jones told Leyland, "of colour and expression and everything,"³⁹ and the *Times* described *Spring* and *Autumn* as "contrasted harmonies of cool and warm colouring."⁴⁰

There is no doubt that Murray Marks and Charles Augustus Howell, the *marchands amateurs* who advised Leyland and other aesthetically conscious patrons, did much to encourage these tendencies, anxiously watching the progress of pictures to ensure that they fitted the decorative schemes they were devising. Marks is known to have "specially selected" pictures for Leyland,⁴¹ and Howell, who was on intimate terms with Burne-Jones at this date and lived near him in Fulham, would decorate rooms in his own house, in blue, white, or gold, to whet the appetite of potential clients. The idea was that they would then commission him to create something similar, or even buy the works of art which the rooms cunningly displayed.

Howell and Marks helped to determine the course of the Aesthetic movement as men of taste advising trend-setting collectors. William Morris exercised a more direct and widespread influence as a manufacturer of many of the artifacts which expressed Aesthetic values. During the 1860s the firm's style changed dramatically, the massive forms and somber colors

of its initial medievalist phase giving way to a lighter and less uncompromising idiom that reflected both the prevailing ethos and the necessity of coming to terms with clients' domestic requirements. In fact, the same tendency is found in the firm's stained glass which, though often used in domestic settings, was obviously mainly conceived for ecclesiastical contexts. The rather drab tones, heavy leading, and bold architectural framework of the earliest windows yield to paler and more delicate effects, with less intrusive leading and a greater dependence on quarries lightly patterned with black and yellow stain. The so-called Green Dining Room at the South Kensington (now Victoria and Albert) Museum, dating from 1866–67, exemplifies the new style (fig. 77). A prestigious commission in its day, which did much to establish the still-young firm, it remains the most intact and accessible of Morris's secular schemes.

The implications of these changes for Burne-Jones need not be labored. To the Green Dining Room alone he contributed six stained-glass panels of girls gathering flowers, all, significantly, dressed in white, as well as a series of eye-level painted panels representing the signs of the zodiac and the months. Both are closely related to his easel painting. All the stained-glass figures were recast as watercolors, while one of the painted panels provided the design for the figure in *Day*, which, together with a companion piece, *Night* (both Fogg Art Museum, Cambridge, Mass.), were to join Leyland's set of Seasons.

The changes in Morris's decorative work had their equivalent in his poetry. Having provided a literary dimension to medievalism in *The Defence of Guenevere* (1858), he was now performing a similar service for the classical revival and the Aesthetic movement in *The Earthly Paradise*. This great cycle of narrative poems was begun in 1865 on his move to London, published in two volumes in 1868–70, and remained to the end of his life his most popular work as a poet and his chief source of fame. The *Defence* had been exclusively medieval in theme; *The Earthly Paradise* embraces both ancient and medieval worlds, taking half its stories from classical and half from Norse, Germanic, and Celtic sources. Stylistically the contrast is no less stark. The *Defence* had consisted of short lyrics and dramatic pieces, often shocking in their brutality; *The Earthly Paradise* is a vast canvas, tapestry-like in its consistency and lack of relief, and so soporific in effect that even Georgie confessed to stabbing herself with pins to keep awake when Morris read it aloud. If Browning had inspired the *Defence*, Chaucer was the great influence on *The Earthly Paradise*, *The Canterbury Tales* suggesting the historical framework for the stories, the combination of tales from classical and romantic literature, the treatment of the Greek stories in terms of a medieval vision, and the fresh, springlike mood that pervades the whole complex structure.



Figure 78. Dante Gabriel Rossetti (1828–1882), *Algernon Charles Swinburne*, 1861. Watercolor, 7 x 6 in. (17.8 x 15.2 cm). Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge

Morris had originally intended to publish the stories in a folio volume with some hundred woodcut illustrations by Burne-Jones. For technical reasons the project was abandoned, but not before Burne-Jones had produced numerous designs, notably a set of forty-seven for “The Story of Cupid and Psyche,” the first story written by Morris, in 1865. These provided him with a bank of compositional ideas on which he was to draw for pictures until the end of his life. Other works are more loosely related; *Saint Theophilus* (fig. 66), for example, illustrates a subject that Morris treated in a poem but eventually rejected. Quite apart from specific themes, the general style of the poem offers obvious parallels to the way Burne-Jones’s art was developing—in terms of scale, imagery, sweetness of feeling, and a classical-medieval synthesis based on Chaucer. Once again, moreover, it is striking how what Morris was doing and what Ruskin was urging coincide. Like the exponents of Ruskin’s “constant art” ideal, Morris was making everything “dainty, delightful and perfect,” and his debt to Chaucer was even greater than Ruskin’s, albeit serving very different ends.

Morris was not alone in giving literary expression to the classical revival. Swinburne did so no less effectively in

Atalanta in Calydon, the verse drama he published in March 1865 and described himself as “pure Greek” in form and spirit. But it is *Poems and Ballads*, published the following year, that is more relevant to Burne-Jones, to whom indeed the book is dedicated. Here, as in *The Earthly Paradise*, there are poems which correspond to specific paintings, most obviously “Laus Veneris” (cat. no. 63) but also “Saint Dorothy” (fig. 66), a theme which seems to have obsessed the circle at this date. (The saint was also the subject of a poem published in 1865 by Bute Montgomerie Rankling, a minor poet associated with the Poetry without Grammar School.) Equally striking is the Burne-Jonesian mood that Swinburne (fig. 78) evokes in several poems, not least the first in the book, “A Ballad of Life”:

I found in dreams a place of wind and flowers,
Full of sweet trees and colour of glad grass,
In midst whereof there was
A lady clothed like summer with sweet hours,
Her beauty, fervent as a fiery moon,
Made my blood burn and swoon
Like a flame rained upon.
Sorrow had filled her shaken eyelids’ blue,
And her mouth’s sad red heavy rose all through
Seemed sad with glad things gone.

The last lines are particularly significant. The words “glad” and “sad” frequently occur in close conjunction in Swinburne’s poetry and prose of the 1860s, and it was no doubt precisely this wistful ambiguity that Burne-Jones was trying to capture in the soulful expression he was now giving to nearly all his figures. Harry Quilter may not have been the most profound of critics (as his enemy Whistler never tired of saying), but he was right when he wrote that “*Poems and Ballads* was only the poetical expression of Pre-Raphaelitism as exemplified in Burne-Jones’s pictures.”⁴²

1. *Memorials*, vol. 1, p. 286.
2. Harry Quilter, *Preferences in Art, Life, and Literature* (London, 1892), p. 6.
3. *Art Journal*, 1864, p. 170.
4. *Art Journal*, 1869, p. 173.
5. *Times* (London), April 29, 1867, p. 6.
6. Ruskin, *Works*, vol. 19 (1905), p. 212.
7. *Times* (London), April 25, 1864, p. 14.
8. Walter Crane, *An Artist’s Reminiscences* (London, 1907), p. 84.
9. *Memorials*, vol. 1, p. 295.
10. G. C. Williamson, *Murray Marks and His Friends* (London, 1919), p. 84. For a modern account of Leyland and his collecting, see M. Susan Duval, “F. R. Leyland: A Maecenas from Liverpool,” *Apollo*, August 1986, pp. 110–15.
11. Sara Norton and M. A. DeWolfe Howe, eds., *Letters of Charles Eliot Norton* (London, 1913), vol. 1, p. 346.
12. Quilter, *Preferences in Art, Life, and Literature*, p. 78.
13. *Daily Chronicle*, December 6, 1906, p. 7.
14. Birmingham collection [1930], p. 31.
15. From a note by R. Langton Douglas on a painting by Antoniazzo Romano in the R. H. Benson Collection, written in New York and

- dated July 1946. The reference was kindly supplied in 1980 by the late Denys Sutton, formerly editor of *Apollo*.
16. See the notes by Charles Fairfax Murray (transcribed by J. R. Holliday) on the techniques of the artists he worked for, now in the Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery.
 17. *Times* (London), April 25, 1864, p. 14.
 18. *Athenaeum*, June 3, 1865, p. 755.
 19. *Memorials*, vol. 1, p. 286.
 20. Surtees 1980, p. 35.
 21. See Williamson, *Murray Marks and His Friends*, pp. 98–99.
 22. William Michael Rossetti and Algernon C. Swinburne, *Notes on the Royal Academy Exhibition, 1868* (London, 1868), p. 32.
 23. *Art Journal*, 1871, pp. 176–77. The significance of this passage was first noticed by Allen Staley in his introduction to *Victorian High Renaissance* (exh. cat., Minneapolis: Minneapolis Institute of Arts, 1978–79), p. 13. See note 24 below.
 24. The title of an exhibition featuring the work of Watts, Leighton, Albert Moore, and Alfred Gilbert held at the Manchester City Art Gallery, the Minneapolis Institute of Arts, and the Brooklyn Museum, 1978–79.
 25. See Keith Roberts's review of the "Victorian High Renaissance" exhibition in *Burlington Magazine* 120 (October 1978), p. 696.
 26. *Fortnightly Review*, October 1877, p. 530. The suggestion that the essay was written long before its publication was made by Lawrence Evans in *Letters of Walter Pater* (Oxford, 1970), p. 8, n. 1.
 27. Rossetti, *Letters*, vol. 2 (1965), p. 519. The picture in question was the *Venus Verticordia* of 1864–68 (Russell-Cotes Art Gallery, Bournemouth).
 28. *Ibid.*, p. 606.
 29. A large group of these sketchbooks is in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London.
 30. Luke Ionides, *Memories*, facsimile ed., with an afterword by Julia Ionides (Ludlow, 1996), p. 46.
 31. Alexander Constantine Ionides Jr., *Ion: A Grandfather's Tale*, vol. 2, *Notes and Index* (n.p.: privately printed, 1927), p. 28.
 32. See Zuzanna Shonfield, *The Precariously Privileged: A Professional Family in Victorian London* (Oxford, 1987), pp. 110–11.
 33. Luke Ionides, *Memories*, p. 11.
 34. See the comments by Georgie Burne-Jones in *Memorials*, vol. 1, pp. 202–3. Lizzie Rossetti gave the Burne-Joneses "a willow-pattern dish" about 1860 (*ibid.*, p. 221), and G. P. Boyce, describing the dinner party at Swinburne's in July 1862 at which Burne-Jones probably first met Whistler (Surtees 1980, p. 35), records that he took "2 old blue and white wedgwood dishes and a very fine Chinese plate or dish" as a "contribution" to his host's "housekeeping."
 35. *James McNeill Whistler* (exh. cat., London: Tate Gallery; Paris: Musée d'Orsay; Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 1995), p. 93.
 36. Dalziel and Dalziel 1901, p. 164.
 37. Rossetti, *Letters*, vol. 2 (1965), p. 552.
 38. Letter to F. R. Leyland, January 25, 1872, quoted in the *Art Journal*, 1892, p. 250, and again in Virginia Surtees, *The Paintings and Drawings of Dante Gabriel Rossetti: A Catalogue Raisonné* (Oxford, 1971), vol. 1, p. 128, under no. 228.
 39. *Memorials*, vol. 2, p. 10.
 40. *Times* (London), May 6, 1869, p. 6.
 41. Williamson, *Murray Marks and His Friends*, p. 86.
 42. Quilter, *Preferences in Art, Life, and Literature*, p. 77.

Cupid and Psyche

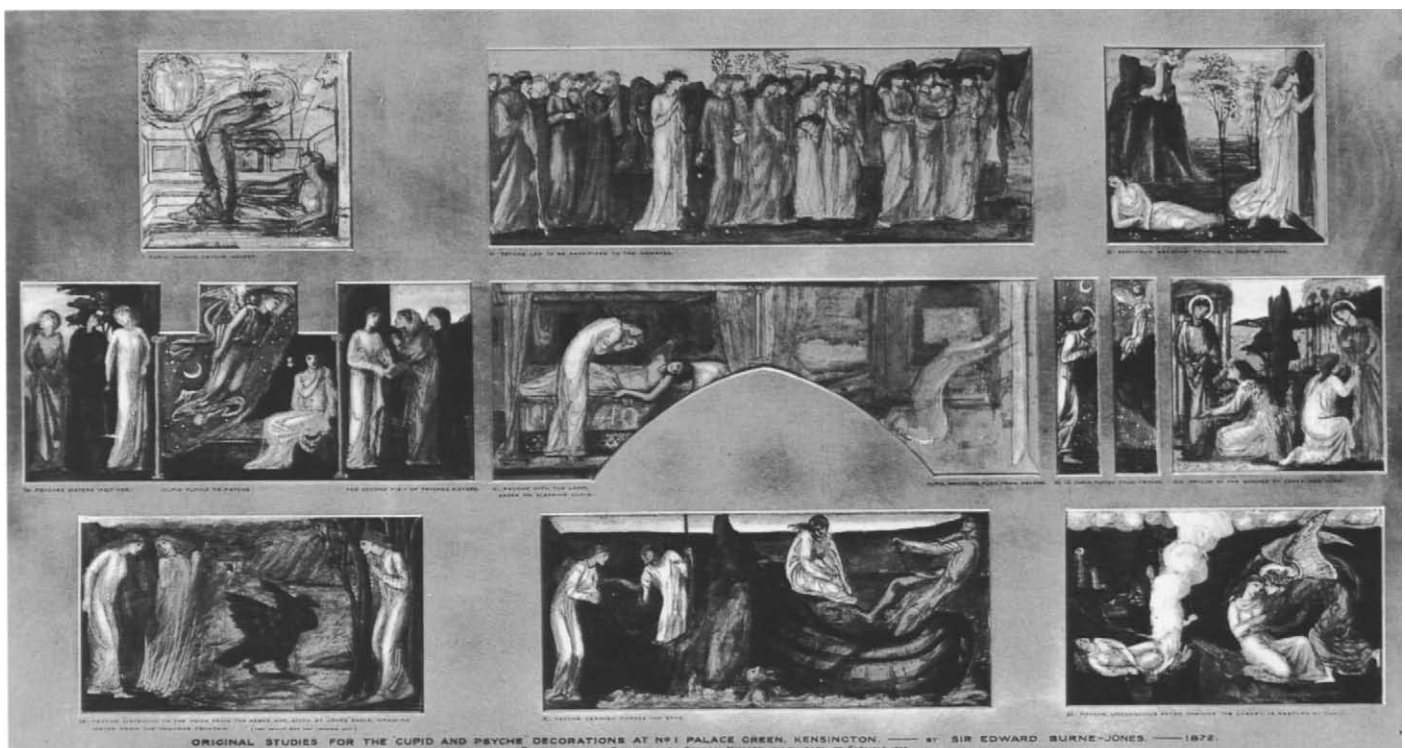
“Designed 70 subjects from the story of Cupid and Psyche.” This laconic entry under 1865 in Burne-Jones’s retrospective list of work introduces one of the themes that would remain a preoccupation for thirty years, taking second place only to the Arthurian legend. The original inspiration came from William Morris, who that year had just completed “The Story of Cupid and Psyche,” the first in the lengthy cycle of narrative poems eventually published as *The Earthly Paradise* from 1868 to 1870. Morris’s idea was to publish a lavish folio edition of “Cupid and Psyche” copiously illustrated with woodcuts, and it was for this that Burne-Jones began to produce designs, beginning with a large number of thumbnail sketches, preserved in albums now at Birmingham and at the Pierpont Morgan Library, New York. Some forty-five woodblocks were actually cut (Morris energetically undertaking thirty-five of them himself), but trial sheets printed at the Chiswick Press were deemed unsuccessful as a union of text and image, and the project was abandoned.¹

Two sketchbooks by Burne-Jones (Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery; Pierpont Morgan Library, New York) show the development of each image in two or three attempts—beginning always with a well-formed idea of the composition, quickly refined. Rarely prepared to waste well-crafted compositions, Burne-Jones turned several of the major subjects into individual pictures, starting with water-

colors of the first and last images of the narrative sequence: the first of several versions of *Cupid Finding Psyche* was begun in 1865, and *Cupid Delivering Psyche* was exhibited at the Old Water-Colour Society in 1867.

In 1872 George Howard (1843–1911), the future 9th Earl of Carlisle and himself a painter with Pre-Raphaelite sympathies, turned to the Morris firm for the decoration of his large new house at 1 Palace Green, Kensington, designed by Philip Webb (1831–1915). The focus was to be the dining room, for which Howard commissioned a series of canvases from Burne-Jones, who devised a scheme to condense his many designs for the Cupid and Psyche narrative into twelve compartments. According to his own record, he “drew in the figures on canvas and painted some time at them” during 1872, but having made only sporadic progress on this ambitious project after a further four years, he happily ceded its completion to Walter Crane (1845–1915), maintaining the right to retouch the paintings before they were finally installed in 1881. He also retained the canvas he thought most successful, reworking it many years later as *The Wedding of Psyche* (cat. no. 41) and transforming the musician figures into another powerful oil, *The Challenge in the Wilderness* (cat. no. 42), left unfinished at his death.

1. For a full account of the illustrations to *The Earthly Paradise*, see Joseph R. Dunlap, *The Book That Never Was* (New York, 1971).



Edward Burne-Jones. Designs for the Cupid and Psyche frieze, 1872. Pencil, sepia, watercolor, and bodycolor, max. 6 x 16 1/4 in. (15.2 x 41.2 cm). Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery





38

37. Cupid Finding Psyche

ca. 1865

Watercolor, bodycolor, and pastel on paper, mounted on linen, 27¼ x 19 in. (70.3 x 48.3 cm)

Signed: EBJ. The original frame retains one of the artist's printed labels: *This picture being painted in watercolour would be injured by the slightest moisture. Great care must be used whenever it is removed from the frame.* Edward Burne-Jones

PROVENANCE: William Graham; his sale, Christie's, April 3, 1886, lot 149; Mrs. R. H. Benson; Christie's, June 21, 1929, lot 83; Mortimer Brandt, New York

EXHIBITED: New Gallery 1898–99, no. 58; Herron Museum of Art 1964, no. 16

Yale Center for British Art, Yale Art Gallery Collection, New Haven.

Mary Gertrude Abbey Fund (B1979.12.1038)

NEW YORK ONLY

38. Cupid Finding Psyche

1865–87

Watercolor and bodycolor with gold paint, 25½ x 19½ in. (64.9 x 49.4 cm)

Signed: EBJ; on backboard: E BURNE-JONES designed 1865, finished 1887

PROVENANCE: Bought by James Blair, 1892; bequeathed by him, 1917

EXHIBITED: Agnew's, Manchester, 1892; Arts Council 1975–76, no. 98; Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna 1986, no. 49

Manchester City Art Galleries (1917.16)

BIRMINGHAM AND PARIS

39.

Cupid Delivering Psyche

1867

Watercolor and bodycolor, 21¼ x 24 in. (54.1 x 61 cm)

Signed and dated: EBJ 1867

PROVENANCE: William R. Moss; Leicester Galleries; purchased, 1959

EXHIBITED: Royal Jubilee Exhibition, Manchester, 1887; Centenary Exhibition, Southport, 1892

Trustees of the Cecil Higgins Art Gallery, Bedford (P.296)

NEW YORK AND BIRMINGHAM

These compositions, which became the first and last images of the Palace Green murals, epitomize Burne-Jones's blend of the classical and the romantic—"mythology in the midst of medievalism," as the *Art Journal* put it¹—which in the Cupid and Psyche series perfectly matches Morris's stated intention in the whole of *The Earthly Paradise* to honor the "continued thread of living Greek tradition coming down almost to the end of the Middle Ages among Greek-speaking people, and overlapping the full development of romanticism in Western Europe."²

The more sculpturally classical drapery of the figures in the opening image accords with the sterner mood of the story's beginning. Jealous of Psyche's beauty, the goddess Venus sends Cupid to destroy her; instead, he falls in love with the sleeping princess:

As Love cast down his eyes with a half smile,
Godlike and cruel, that faded in a while,
And long he stood above her hidden eyes
With red lips parted in a god's surprise.

After performing a series of harrowing tasks, Psyche is finally reunited with Cupid and, forgiven by Venus, is allowed to remain with him as an immortal. The moment illustrated in *Cupid Delivering Psyche* is treated by Burne-Jones more in the



39

manner of the romantic Pre-Raphaelitism of earlier watercolors (such as *Cupid's Forge*, 1861; private collection), with softer, rounded forms and suffused color.

A similar watercolor of *Cupid Finding Psyche*, rather darker in color and dated 1866, is in the British Museum,³ while a group of six figure-and-drapery studies for the composition is in the Fogg Art Museum, Cambridge, Massachusetts.⁴ The prime version of *Cupid Delivering Psyche* (London Borough of Hammersmith Public Libraries) was exhibited at the Old Water-Colour Society in 1867; another, unfinished, is in the Sheffield City Art Galleries.

1. *Art Journal*, June 1866, p. 174.

2. Mackail 1899, vol. 1, pp. 178–79.

3. British Museum collection 1994, no. 58.

4. Fogg Art Museum 1946, no. 6–11.



40a

40a–40l.

Edward Burne-Jones and Walter Crane

The Story of Cupid and Psyche

1872–81

PROVENANCE: Commissioned by George Howard; presented by his daughters, 1922

Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery (1922–187–198)

NEW YORK AND BIRMINGHAM

Ten years Burne-Jones's junior, George Howard combined wealth and social status (inheriting Castle Howard and its estates as the 9th Earl of Carlisle in 1889) with a passion for art. A good painter in his own right, remembered for his place in the Etruscan school alongside Frederic Leighton (1830–1896) and Giovanni Costa (1827–1903), he reveled in the company of artists; the diary of his wife, Rosalind, records meetings in 1865 with G. F. Watts, Holman Hunt, Millais, and Val Prinsep (1838–1904), who took him to see Burne-Jones on April 6.¹

Impressed by Prinsep's new house in Holland Park Road, which he visited in 1866 with Burne-Jones and Edward Poynter, Howard commissioned its architect, Philip Webb, to build a mansion at 1 Palace Green, Kensington (now Kensington Palace Gardens), on a street that was to become known as Millionaires' Row. Upon its completion in 1872, William Morris was asked to furnish and decorate the house and Burne-Jones commissioned for a series of canvases in the dining room to form a frieze above panels of naturalistic ornament in silver and gold on a peacock-green background, with the dado carrying texts, lettered in gold, from *The Earthly Paradise*.² Burne-Jones began work immediately, but had completed little by 1876, when Walter Crane took over the commission.

Crane generally followed Burne-Jones's designs, but he admitted allowing himself "considerable freedom, especially in the subjects not already commenced or carried far, though I



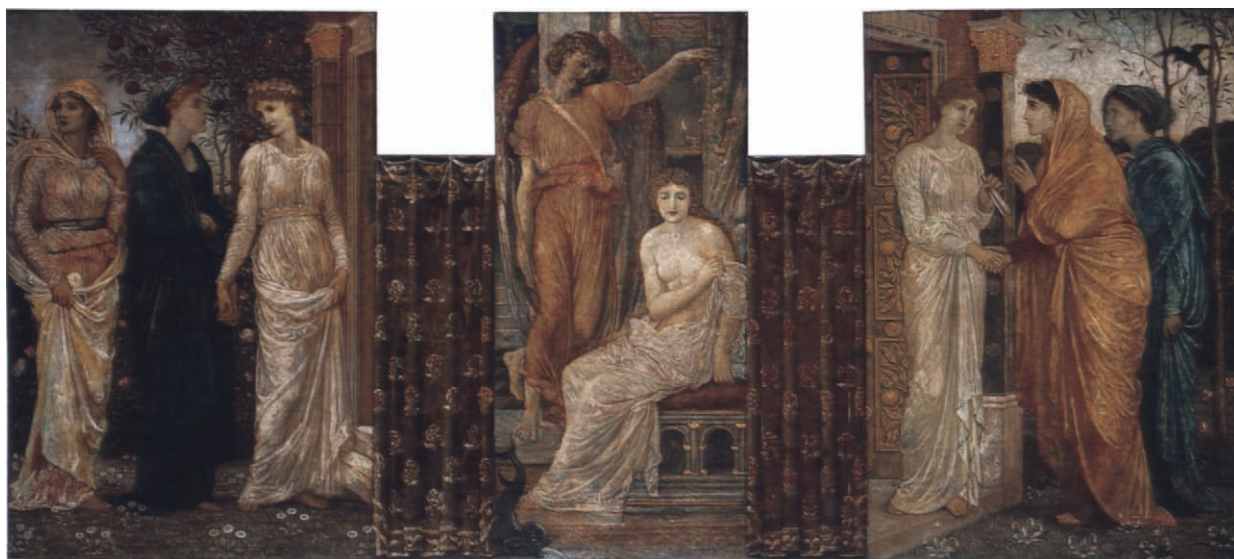
40b

endeavoured to preserve the spirit and feeling of the original designs.”³ In addition to providing his own version of *The Procession* (the canvas of which Burne-Jones had decided to keep), Crane’s chief alteration to the cycle was to substitute a simplified subject, *Psyche Passes Safely through the Shadowy Meads*, for Burne-Jones’s only half-suggested and somewhat stilted image of *Psyche Drawing Water from the Dragons’ Fountain*.⁴

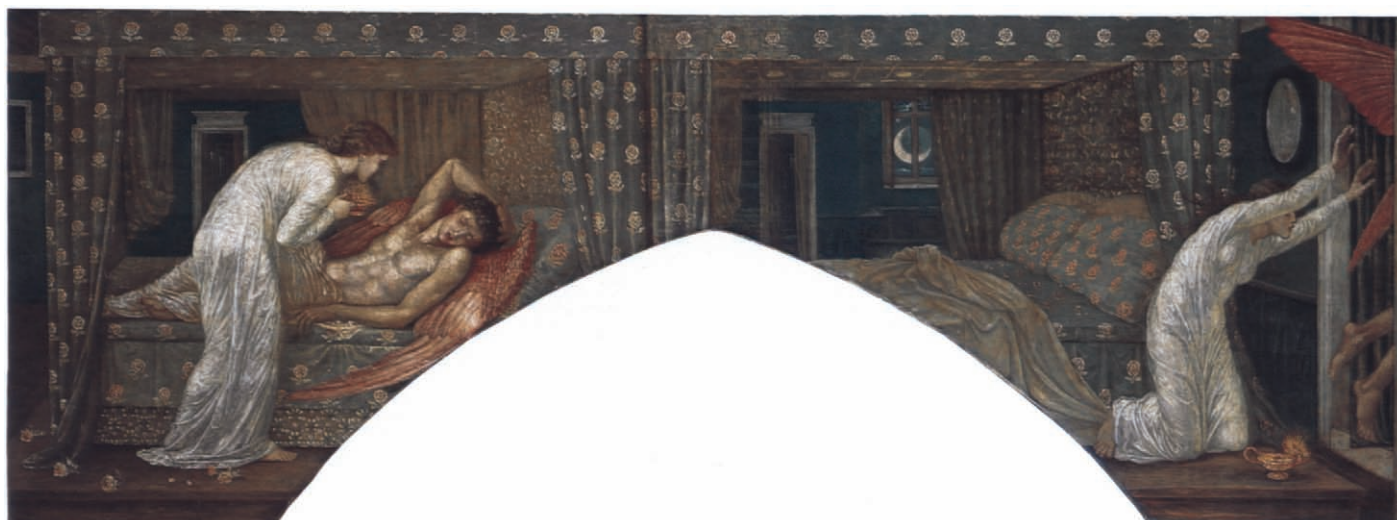
Completed in 1881, the canvases were then subjected to quite substantial retouching by Burne-Jones, and not solely to make them harmonize with Morris & Company’s decoration. “I hope Crane won’t be hurt,” he wrote, “[that] I have had to alter much—I think they were painted in too dry a medium, for some of the colour wipes off with a dry duster.”⁵ Morris himself reported to Rosalind Howard on November 4, 1881, that “Ned [Burne-Jones] has been doing a great deal to the dining room pictures & very much improving them: so that the room will be light and pleasant after all, & the pictures very beautiful.”⁶



40c



40d



40e



40f



40g

The house was occupied by the Howard family for forty years. When they gave it up in 1922, the by-now-unfashionable paintings were taken down and presented (along with a set of preliminary sketch designs in watercolor) to the Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery.

1. Virginia Surtees, *The Artist and the Autocrat: George and Rosalind Howard, Earl and Countess of Carlisle* (Salisbury, 1988), p. 39.
2. "The wood-work . . . was at first entirely white; but this pigment was found to mar the effect of the paintings, and so it was replaced by the present colour" (*Studio* 1898, p. 10). "The room at first sight appears by no means gorgeous," this account noted, "nor even sumptuous—indeed, its momentary effect is somewhat austere; but as the eye lights on the frieze which surrounds it, the coffered ceiling with decorated beams above, and the panels of the dado below, rich in gold and silver, the whole appears to glow like a page of an illuminated missal" (*ibid.*, p. 3).

3. Walter Crane, *An Artist's Reminiscences* (New York and London, 1907), quoted in Waters 1975, p. 340.
4. Burne-Jones's composition survives in a small watercolor sketch, part of the complete series of designs now at Birmingham (Art Services International 1995–96, no. 99).
5. Surtees, *Artist and Autocrat*, p. 131.
6. Morris, *Letters*, vol. 2a, 1881–1884 (1987), p. 75.

40a.

Cupid finding Psyche asleep by a fountain
Oil on canvas, 47 x 49 in. (119.5 x 124.5 cm)

40b.

The King and other mourners, preceded by trumpeters, accompanying Psyche to the mountain, where she is to be abandoned to the monster, according to Apollo's oracle
Oil on canvas, 47 x 128 in. (119.5 x 325 cm)

40c.

Zephyrus bearing Psyche from the mountain to Cupid's valley and the House of Gold; Psyche entering the house; Psyche asleep outside the house
Oil on canvas, 47 x 49 in. (119.5 x 124.5 cm)

40d.

Psyche's sisters visit her at Cupid's house; Psyche, unrobing, listens to the voice of Love invisible; Psyche's sisters bidding her farewell after their second visit
Oil on canvas, 47 x 105 in. (119.5 x 266.7 cm)

40e.

Psyche, holding the lamp, gazes enraptured on the face of the sleeping Cupid; Psyche kneels, with arms held out in supplication, as Cupid flies away through the doorway
Oil on canvas, 47 x 129⁷/₈ in. (119.5 x 330 cm)

40f.

Psyche gazes in despair at Cupid flying away into the night
Oil on canvas, 48¹/₄ x 9 in. (122.5 x 23 cm)

40g.

Cupid flying away from Psyche
Oil on canvas, 47 x 9¹/₄ in. (119.5 x 23.5 cm)

40h.

Psyche at the Shrine of Ceres; Psyche at the Shrine of Juno
Oil on canvas, 47 x 49 in. (119.5 x 124.5 cm)

40i.

Psyche, sent by Venus with a casket to Proserpine, passes safely through the shadowy meads, disregarding the call for help from the shadowy men trying to load an ass, and the three old women weaving, who are sent to ensnare her
Oil on canvas, 47 x 49 in. (119.5 x 124.5 cm)



40h



40i



40j



40k



401

40j.

Psyche giving the coin to the ferryman of the Styx; the dead man in the form of Psyche's father rising from the water as Psyche is ferried across to Hades

Oil on canvas, 47 x 105 in. (119.5 x 266.7 cm)

the beauty it contained might become hers, lies unconscious on the ground; Cupid, warned by the Phoenix of Psyche's danger, flies to her rescue
Oil on canvas, 46 1/8 x 72 in. (119 x 183 cm)

40k.

Psyche receiving the casket back from Proserpine; Psyche, brought back to the Upper Regions by Charon, having opened the casket in the hope that

40l.

Psyche entering the portals of Olympus with Cupid, preceded by Mercury, is welcomed by the Gods, and is offered the cup of immortality by Hebe
Oil on canvas, 78 x 129 1/4 in. (198 x 328.8 cm)



41

41.

The Wedding of Psyche

1895

Oil on canvas, 48 x 84 in. (122 x 213.4 cm)

Signed and dated lower left: EB J 1895

PROVENANCE: George McCulloch; his sale, Christie's, 1913

EXHIBITED: New Gallery, London, 1895

Musées Royaux des Beaux-Arts de Belgique, Brussels (7350)

42.

The Challenge in the Wilderness

1894-98

Oil on canvas, 51 x 38 in. (129.5 x 96.5 cm)

PROVENANCE: First studio sale, Christie's, July 16, 1898, lot 80;

Sir J. T. Middlemore; sold by the Middlemore Trustees, 1973

EXHIBITED: Arts Council 1975-76, no. 191; Isetan Museum of Art 1987a, no. 30

Collection Lord Lloyd-Webber

NEW YORK ONLY





Edward Burne-Jones. Sketch for *The Procession of the King Accompanying Psyche to the Mountain*, 1865. Pencil, 5 x 13½ in. (12.7 x 34.3 cm). Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery

Both this and the preceding composition (cat. no. 41) were worked out through pencil designs in an 1865 volume of studies (Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery; 1927P648), and they are united in the second panel of the Palace Green frieze. A note in Burne-Jones's work record for 1875 that he had "designed trumpeters for Psyche's procession" suggests that he was already thinking of reworking them separately, although there is no evidence that he began to do this until the 1890s.¹

The Wedding of Psyche was exhibited at the New Gallery in 1895, but *The Challenge in the Wilderness*, as Burne-Jones had referred to it in 1894, remained unfinished, and was included in the first studio sale of 1898. Both appear, unframed and on easels, in a photograph of the artist's home studio at The Grange, Fulham, published in the *Art Annual* monograph of Christmas 1894.² A reproductive engraving of *The Wedding of Psyche* by Felix Jasinski (1862–1901) was published by Arthur Tooth and Sons in 1900.³

These works exemplify the degree of self-contained abstraction which Burne-Jones's painting had reached by the mid-1890s. The last vestiges of naturalism give way to an extreme stylization in figurative detail, most notable in the attenuated hands and faces, as well as in the heavily weighted, seemingly brittle drapery. The dominating blue-green tones, first explored in the Perseus series (cat. nos. 88–97), here give an even eerier cast to the ghostly figures as they proceed through the barren landscape.

1. A small (11¼ x 8 in.) but highly finished pencil drawing of *The Challenge in the Wilderness*, certainly of later date, was sold at Sotheby's (Books), October 30, 1997, lot 54.
2. Cartwright 1894, p. 31.
3. Hartnoll 1988, p. 50, pl. 20.

43•

The Prioress's Tale

ca. 1865–98

Watercolor with bodycolor, 40¾ x 24¼ in. (103.4 x 62.8 cm)

Signed and dated lower left: EB-J 1865–98

PROVENANCE: Bought from the artist by Lady Colville, 1898; bought from Agnew's by the estate of Samuel Bancroft, 1924

EXHIBITED: New Gallery, London, 1898, no. 82; New Gallery 1898–99, no. 36; Arts Council 1975–76, no. 194

Delaware Art Museum, Wilmington. Samuel and Mary R. Bancroft Memorial (35–41)

The picture illustrates one of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, his collection of narrative poems told by a company of pilgrims as they make their way to the tomb of Thomas à Becket in Canterbury Cathedral. The story narrated by the genteel Prioress tells of a seven-year-old Christian boy who lives with this widowed mother in an Asian city and is devoted to the Virgin Mary. He learns by heart a hymn in her honor, "O alma redemptoris mater," and is murdered by some Jews when he sings as he passes through their ghetto; his throat is cut and his body thrown into a pit. The Virgin lays a grain of corn on his tongue, and miraculously he continues to sing her praises, leading the authorities to discover his corpse and punish his assassins. His body is placed before the high altar of the abbey, and the abbot beseeches him to reveal how it is that he still manages to sing. The boy recounts the miracle, and explains that when the grain of corn is removed the Virgin will come for his soul. This is done, and he is given a martyr's burial:

And in a tombe of marbul stones cleere
Enclosen they his litel body sweete.
Ther he is now, God leve us for to meete!

Chaucer was one of the cornerstones of Burne-Jones's and Morris's medievalism. They first read him as undergraduates at Oxford, and their last great collaborative venture was the lavishly illustrated edition of his works issued by the Kelmscott Press shortly before Morris's death in 1896. Burne-Jones's picture was in progress for almost as long, and is the most remarkable example we have of his tendency to develop his pictorial ideas over long periods of time.

The design was conceived in 1858 as decoration for a wardrobe (Ashmolean Museum, Oxford), the subject perhaps being considered suitable because this is a word (in the sense of "privy") that Chaucer uses in describing the disposal of his hero's body. Designed by Philip Webb and exhibited at the Hogarth Club that year, the wardrobe was given to William and Jane Morris when they married in April 1859. It stood in their bedroom at Red House and later adorned the drawing room at Kelmscott House, their London home from 1879. Meanwhile, the present picture had been started—in 1865 according to the date it bears but in 1869 according to Burne-Jones's autograph work record (Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge). It was commissioned by William Graham, but Burne-Jones's decision to repeat the composition at this date may also reflect Ruskin's theory about



“constant” art and “dramatic” art, particularly his belief that artists had a moral duty to paint elevating subjects and to suppress horrific incidents which, by appealing to man’s morbid love of the sensational, had a socially harmful effect. The chief expression of this doctrine in Burne-Jones’s work is *Saint Theophilus and the Angel* (fig. 66), a watercolor of 1863–67 in which the miraculous and iconographically attractive results of a martyrdom are seen in the foreground while the execution itself is relegated to the middle distance. A similar approach is found in *The Prioress’s Tale*, where the focus is on what Ruskin would have called the “beautiful circumstance” of the Virgin placing the grain of corn on the boy’s tongue, while the “harmfully dramatic” scene of his being seized by the murderous Jews is played down in the background on the right. That the pictures both have urban settings in which statues of pagan deities figure prominently tends to underline the connection.

Whatever the case, *The Prioress’s Tale* hung fire. William Graham, who died in 1885, never received it, and it was taken up only at the end of Burne-Jones’s life when, aware that his reputation was declining and that unfinished pictures would be a burden to his heirs, he was anxious to complete old work. Though suffering from influenza, he worked on it during the early months of 1898 and finished it in mid-April. It was then immediately sent to the New Gallery, where it was still on exhibition when he died on June 16. The art critic of the *Times* described it as “very quaintly composed, and with a great deal of invention and interesting detail.”¹ F. G. Stephens, writing in the *Athenaeum*, commented as follows: “The chief charms of the picture are the noble and gentle demeanour of the Virgin, clad in a lovely blue and purple, and the sweetness and harmony of the whole scene, where even the effect (a glowing twilight) emphasises the sentiment. In other respects the picture is by no means a masterpiece.”² Burne-Jones had been concerned that, like other late works, the picture would fail to sell, but shortly before its exhibition it was bought by a new patron, Lady Colville, after she had “fussed about it for some time.”³ The picture was shown again, together with *The Dream of Launcelot* (cat. no. 162), at the Exposition Universelle in Paris in 1900. This was the last occasion until recent times that his work was seen in the city where he had enjoyed such popularity in the early 1890s.

Burne-Jones must have repainted the picture extensively in 1898, since nearly all the surface work seems to date from this period and the style reveals many of his later mannerisms. The picture is, however, much brighter in color than many works of the 1890s, which show a strong tendency to be almost monochromatic. In earlier days he had always been admired as a colorist, even by his sternest critics, and the new trend was not popular. The *Times* complained about it in 1895 (see cat. no. 161); Graham Robertson, who attributed it to the influence of the artist’s son, Philip, thought it deplorable;⁴ and Burne-Jones himself noted with a certain irritation that friends “turned” from *The Dream of Launcelot*, one of the most somber of his later works, to the “brighter” *Aurora* (Queensland Art

Gallery, Brisbane) when they saw them together in the studio.⁵ The moral was obvious, especially in view of his anxiety about selling his pictures, and it may be that *The Prioress’s Tale* marks a conscious attempt at this very late stage of his career to revert to a more appealing palette. In this particular case, however, there was possibly a further reason. His assistant T. M. Rooke, who helped him with certain details of the picture, recorded that his master worked on it partly at Rottingdean, his country retreat on the Sussex coast, and was dismayed when he saw it in the brilliant seaside light.⁶ The unusually bright and vivid tones may be the result of an attempt to paint up to this exceptional illumination.

It has been observed that Burne-Jones makes considerable use of flower symbolism in *The Prioress’s Tale*, the lilies representing purity, the poppies consolation, the sunflowers adoration, and the wallflowers fidelity in adversity.⁷ However, he was also well aware of the formal values of these flowers, observing that they “come at intervals like those in a tune,” and “humming as he pointed to one after the other.”⁸ The comment is an interesting echo of the idea, so fashionable during the Aesthetic period, that art (as Walter Pater had put it) “constantly aspires towards the condition of music.”

Several studies for the picture are recorded, including one for the Virgin, dating from the early phase of work in the late 1860s,⁹ and one for the head of the boy, dated 1898.¹⁰ The model for this was Edward Horner, the elder son of Burne-Jones’s close friend Frances Horner (cat. no. 107) and a grandson of his patron William Graham. Born in 1888 and educated at Eton, Edward was commissioned on the outbreak of war in 1914 and killed at the battle of Cambrai three years later. A memorial to him, designed by the architect Sir Edwin Lutyens and bearing an equestrian statue by the painter of horses Sir Alfred Munnings, is in Mells Church, Somerset. The “Souls,” the social set of which Frances Horner had been a leading member, suffered grievously from the deaths of their sons during the Great War. Another casualty was Raymond Asquith, the son of Herbert Asquith, the Prime Minister, who had married Edward Horner’s sister, Katharine.

Burne-Jones also illustrated “The Prioress’s Tale” in the Kelmescott *Chaucer*, but the treatment there is different. The incidents combined in the painting become the subject of two separate designs, and there are many variations of detail.

[JC]

1. *Times* (London), April 23, 1898, p. 10.

2. *Athenaeum*, no. 3680, May 7, 1898, p. 603.

3. T. M. Rooke’s notes of conversations in Burne-Jones’s studio, unpublished section, p. 535 (National Art Library, Victoria and Albert Museum, London).

4. Kerrison Preston, ed., *Letters from Graham Robertson* (London, 1953), pp. 284, 442.

5. *Memorials*, vol. 2, p. 258.

6. Rooke’s notes, p. 513; see note 3 above.

7. Delaware Art Museum Collection (1978) 1984, p. 36.

8. *Memorials*, vol. 2, p. 333.

9. Private collection; Burlington Fine Arts Club 1899, no. 126, and *The Pre-Raphaelites as Painters and Draughtsmen* (exh. cat., King’s Lynn, Norfolk: Fermoy Art Gallery, 1971), no. 7.

10. Christie’s, November 2, 1990, lot 169, illus.



44. **The Lament**

1865–66

Watercolor with bodycolor on paper laid down on canvas, 18¾ x 31½ in.
(47.5 x 79.5 cm)

Signed and dated lower left: EBJ 1866

PROVENANCE: Bought from the artist by John Hamilton Trist in 1867;
his sale, Christie's, April 9, 1892, lot 15, bought in at £84; Sir Frank
Brangwyn, who presented it to the William Morris Gallery in 1941

EXHIBITED: Old Water-Colour Society, London, 1869, no. 43; Arts
Council 1975–76, no. 93; Tate Gallery 1997, no. 25

William Morris Gallery, Walthamstow (London Borough of Waltham
Forest; BRW65)

Painted, according to the artist's own work record, in 1865 but dated 1866, this picture marks a development from *Green Summer* of 1864 (fig. 63) and *Le Chant d'Amour* of 1865 (cat. no. 30). Like them, it has no real subject, seeking to evoke a

mood rather than to illustrate a story, and in common with *Le Chant d'Amour* it depends partly on music to set the emotional tone. It differs from its predecessors, however, in being inspired not by the Giorgionesque convention but by classical Greek sculpture, especially the Parthenon frieze in the British Museum.

Unlike most artists of the period, for whom drawing from the antique was the bedrock of their student training, Burne-Jones had come to classical sculpture comparatively late. "I know," he wrote in 1880, "that if there had been one cast from ancient Greek sculpture . . . to be seen in Birmingham when I was a boy, I should have begun to paint ten years before I did."¹ In fact such casts did exist, having been given by Sir Robert Lawley to the local Society of Arts on its founding in 1821, and Burne-Jones must have seen them when he attended evening classes at the School of Design in the late 1840s. But they evidently made no impact on him, the school's uninspired teaching and the lack of any taste in his own home surroundings effectively rendering them invisible. Nor did his meeting with Rossetti in 1856 bring enlightenment. His hero actively discouraged



Edward Burne-Jones. Copy of the figure of Ares (Mars) on the Parthenon frieze, ca. 1864–65. Pencil, $7\frac{3}{4} \times 10\frac{1}{4}$ in. (19.7 x 26 cm). Victoria and Albert Museum, London



Edward Burne-Jones. Study for *The Lament*, ca. 1865. Pencil and red chalk, $11\frac{3}{4} \times 8\frac{1}{8}$ in. (29.8 x 20.7 cm). Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery

him from studying the antique on the grounds that “such study came too early in a man’s life and was apt to crush out his individuality.”²

In fact it was not until the late 1850s, as a result of a deliberate campaign to counteract Rossetti’s influence on his infatuated young followers, that Burne-Jones began to take a serious interest in Greek sculpture. Ruskin was urging him to look at the Elgin Marbles in an attempt to inculcate the quality of “repose” by which he set such store, and which he found so sadly lacking in the medievalizing excesses of Rossetti’s circle; similar advice came from another mentor, G. F. Watts, who wanted him to improve his drawing. Watts had the most profound respect for the Elgin Marbles, kept casts of them in his studio, and based his own style on a dual allegiance to Phidias and Titian. Yet even without these promptings Burne-Jones would probably have moved toward classicism in the 1860s; or rather, the ideas of Ruskin and Watts were strands in a general development that affected the whole field of idealist figure painting in England at this period, touching the Pre-Raphaelites no less than those young artists—Leighton, Poynter, Whistler, Albert Moore—who had had greater or lesser contact with the Continental academic tradition. Response to the ancient world varied widely, from the purest Aestheticism of Whistler and Moore to the anecdotal historicism of Poynter and Alma-Tadema, the latter having settled in London in 1870. Burne-Jones, with his Giorgionesque background, was naturally inclined to the Aesthetic approach, and for several years in the late 1860s his work had a close affinity with that of Whistler and Moore. Though the Ruskin libel trial would later divide them (see p. 195), he certainly knew Whistler at this date, and probably Moore as well.

Burne-Jones’s sketchbooks at this period are full of copies after the antique, some taken from books such as Ennio Quirino Visconti’s *Museo Pio-Clementino* (1782–1807) and Pierre Bouillon’s *Musée des Antiques* (1821–27), others from the sculpture in the British Museum, which was conveniently close to the rooms that he and his family occupied at 62 Great Russell Street from 1861 to the end of 1864.³ There are many reflections of this study in his current work, but the chief example is *The Lament*, with its friezelike composition, its pale, chalky colors, creating a sense of low relief, and its figures expressing a mood of restrained sadness, like those on a Greek stela or gravestone. In fact, as so often with Burne-Jones, the line from source to finished picture can be traced with revealing clarity. One of his sketchbook copies is taken from the seated figure of Ares (Mars) on the Parthenon frieze. The god of war is shown seated facing left, with his hands clasped on his knees, and he clearly inspired an early study for the young woman on the right in the painting, in which she assumes an upright pose. In further studies and the painting itself she bends forward in an attitude more expressive of grief, although she retains the clasped hands of the Greek original.

The Elgin frieze, whether the groups of seated deities or the Panathenaic procession, was also the crucial classical source for Whistler and Moore, and it has already been noted that *The Lament* finds many parallels in their work (see p. 114). The most striking are *The Marble Seat* by Moore (fig. 74), his first fully Aesthetic picture, exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1865, and Whistler’s *Symphony in White, No. 3* (fig. 75), begun that year and exhibited at the Academy in 1867. The three pictures are contemporary; all depend, to one degree or another, on the same source; and although the Moore is lost, and now

known only from an old photograph, it is safe to say that all were carefully orchestrated color harmonies in a light key. One of the most interesting points of comparison is the way in which Burne-Jones and Whistler both introduce sprays of foliage and blossom at the right in their pictures, partly for compositional purposes but also to help create the desired chromatic effect. It is not impossible that Burne-Jones, like Whistler, had Japanese art in mind at this point, thus seeking the synthesis between classical and Far Eastern art on which Aestheticism was so largely based.

The Lament was not exhibited at the Old Water-Colour Society until 1869. It was listed as *A Lament* in the catalogue, and this may have been Burne-Jones's preferred title, even though he refers to it as *The Lament* in his autograph work record. Few of the critics noticed it, their attention focused instead on *The Wine of Circe* (fig. 24), a much larger and more eye-catching picture that was generally regarded as a landmark in the artist's development. *The Lament* was bought by John Hamilton Trist, a Brighton wine merchant whose collection also included one of Albert Moore's most Aesthetic works, *Pomegranates* (1866; Guildhall Art Gallery, London), some twenty pictures by the Pre-Raphaelite painter Arthur Hughes, and examples of Rossetti, Madox Brown, Leighton, Alma-Tadema, and others. Trist's pictures were sold in 1892, and *The Lament* subsequently belonged to the decorative artist Sir Frank Brangwyn (1867–1943), an omnivorous collector with Pre-Raphaelite connections, since he had begun his career working for William Morris. A later version of the picture exists, smaller, in oils, and with a landscape background (private collection). [JC]

1. *Memorials*, vol. 2, p. 100.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 149.

3. Six of the sketchbooks are in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London (nos. E.1-1955–E.6-1955).

45. Elaine

Designed 1870

Stained-glass panel, 35¼ x 21½ in. (89.4 x 53.7 cm); executed by Morris, Marshall, Faulkner & Co.

PROVENANCE: Bequeathed by J. R. Holliday, 1927

EXHIBITED: Victoria and Albert Museum 1996, no. H.40

Victoria and Albert Museum, London (C.321-1927)

Burne-Jones had contributed four of the thirteen subjects in the Tristram and Iseult series of stained-glass panels made in 1862 for the Bradford merchant Walter Dunlop (and now in the Bradford City Art Galleries). He was called upon again by Morris in 1870 for a rare revival of an Arthurian



45

subject, this time a small pair of single figures, Launcelot and Elaine, as part of an extensive scheme for Hill Place, Upminster, Essex.¹ His account book contains the following entry under January 1870: "To Launcelot and Elaine & I never asked why Launcelot & Elaine £4 each."² He was perhaps querying the choice of these figures rather than their pairing, since the story of Launcelot (Sir Thomas Malory's spelling) and Elaine appears both in *Le Morte d'Arthur* and in Tennyson's *Idylls of the King*, published in 1859.

Burne-Jones's preference for Malory's original text (or, at least, the text in Robert Southey's edition) would not have eclipsed his likely memory of the opening lines of Tennyson's "Lancelot and Elaine":

Elaine the fair, Elaine the loveable,
Elaine, the lily maid of Astolat,
High in her chamber up a tower to the east
Guarded the sacred shield of Lancelot.



Elaine is depicted by Burne-Jones much as the blighted lovers in Chaucer's "Legend of Goode Wimmen" (see cat. nos. 28, 29), sorrowfully pining for Launcelot, whom she loves but who cannot return her affection because of his passion for Guinevere. In the entirety of the Arthurian legend, Elaine's sorrowful death and the bearing of her body to Camelot proved to be one of the most popular sources of inspiration for British artists in the mid-nineteenth century.³

The placing of the figure as it were in silhouette, with a simple, naturalistic ground and a clear background, was a development specific to Morris stained glass in the late 1860s, in both church and domestic windows. Similar treatment was accorded to the saints and historical figures in the major commission for Peterhouse, Cambridge (1869–74), both for the larger figures in the Hall and for the smaller subjects—including depictions of Homer, Dante, and Chaucer by Burne-Jones—in the Combination Room.⁴ All have lively, stylized plant motifs painted on the background quarries; those used in the *Elaine* panel seem to be unique, and are probably a deliberate reference to "the lily maid of Astolat."

1. According to Martin Harrison in *Victoria and Albert Museum* 1996, p. 133. The figures were repeated in 1882 for Lunefield, a house in Kirkby Lonsdale, Cumbria, designed by the architect Alfred Waterhouse (1830–1905); these were later returned to Morris & Company, although the companion panel, *Launcelot*, is now lost.
2. Sewter 1974–75, vol. 2, p. 104.
3. See Debra Mancoff, *The Arthurian Revival in Victorian Art* (New York, 1990), pp. 174–77.
4. Sewter 1974–75, vol. 2, pp. 44–46; vol. 1, pls. 325–42.

46. The King's Wedding

1870
Watercolor and bodycolor with gold paint on vellum, 12½ x 10¼ in.
(32 x 26 cm)
Signed: E BURNE JONES
PROVENANCE: William Graham; his sale, Christie's, April 8, 1886, lot 146
EXHIBITED: New Gallery 1898–99, no. 14; Arts Council 1975–76, no. 119
Clemens-Sels-Museum, Neuss (1997/119)

In 1867 Burne-Jones discovered a major patron in William Graham (1818–1885), a Scottish merchant and future Liberal Member of Parliament for Glasgow. Graham represented the ideal collector, as keen to acquire small pictures as larger works that occupied a much greater amount of studio time. Two such cabinet pieces were the watercolors *The King's Wedding*, a jewel-like miniature on vellum, and the larger *Love Disguised as Reason* (South African Cultural History Museum, Cape Town, on long loan to the South African National Gallery), both dating from 1870.¹ The *Art Journal*'s comment on the latter, included in one of the artist's last exhibits at the Old Water-Colour Society in 1870, is applicable to both: "The

grace of classic Art is infused with the ardour of mediaeval styles: the colour is brilliant as a missal, solemn as a church-window."²

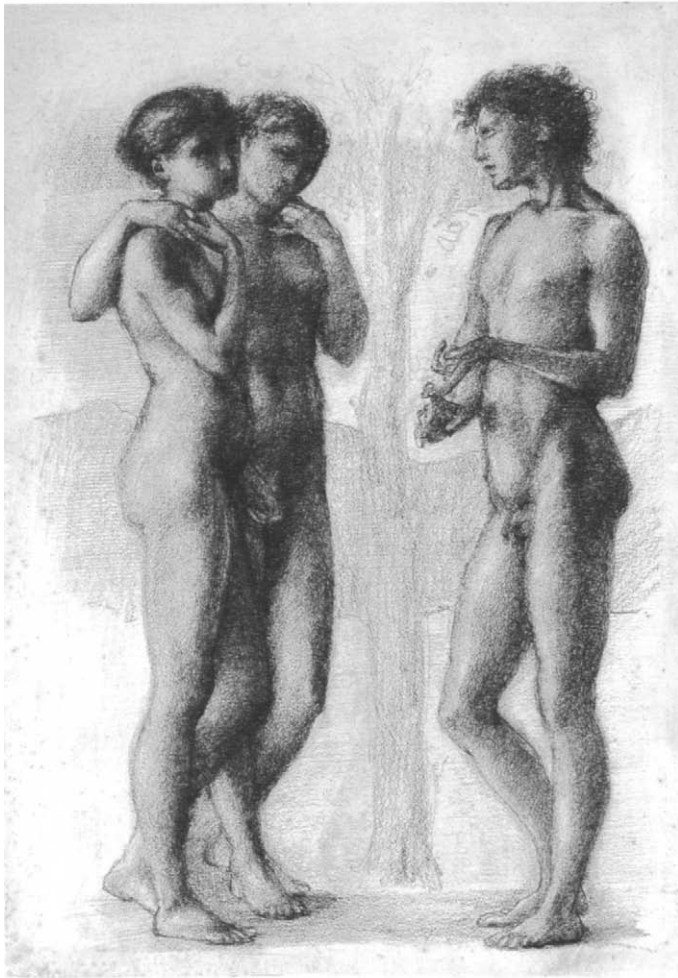
There seems to be no particular narrative to *The King's Wedding*; compositionally, it shares the friezelike qualities of the Saint George series, as well as the compact grouping of figures typical of many of the studies for Cupid and Psyche. Ruskin saw the picture while staying with Graham at his country house in Perthshire in September 1878, and described it (along with Rossetti's *Ecce Ancilla Domini!* and Millais's *The Blind Girl*) in *The Three Colours of Pre-Raphaelitism*, originally published as two articles in the magazine *Nineteenth Century* for November and December of that year. Although loftily declaring it something that "has been perhaps done in the course of a summer afternoon," he praised Burne-Jones's command of detail, with "figures of the average size of Angelico's on any altar predella; and the heads, of those on an average Corinthian or Syracusan coin. . . . The deep tone of the picture leaves several of the faces in obscurity, and none are drawn with much care, not even the bride's; but with enough to show that her features are at least as beautiful as those of an ordinary Greek goddess, while the depth of the distant background throws out her pale head in an almost lunar, yet unexaggerated, light; and the white and blue flowers of her narrow coronal, though merely white and blue, shine, one knows not how, like gems."³

1. *Love Disguised as Reason* is reproduced in Harrison and Waters 1973, fig. 131.
2. *Art Journal*, June 1870, p. 173.
3. Ruskin, *Works*, vol. 34 (1908), pp. 151–52.

47. Study for "Love Disguised as Reason"

ca. 1870
Black chalk and pencil, 17¼ x 11¼ in. (44 x 30 cm)
PROVENANCE: Presented by Sir Frank Brangwyn, 1936
William Morris Gallery, Walthamstow (London Borough of Waltham Forest; BrD10)
NEW YORK AND BIRMINGHAM

The superb drawing for *Love Disguised as Reason*, one of Burne-Jones's finest large-scale studies, demonstrates how he would devote full attention to each part of such a design, modeling the figure of Love (Cupid) from the nude even though it was to appear wholly clothed in the picture itself. An individual study for Love, this time draped, is in the Birmingham collection.¹ There is no literary narrative in the subject, nor any intended reference to the kind of moral dialogue one would expect from a late-eighteenth-century image with such a title. Cupid's "young face, half hidden by the falling folds of his hood, wears an appearance of wisdom, as, duly emphasising his points by the action of his hands, he lays before his fair listeners some eloquent and quite irrefutable



47



Edward Burne-Jones, *Love Disguised as Reason*. Watercolor and bodycolor, 26½ x 12½ in. (67.5 x 32 cm). South African Cultural History Museum, on loan to the South African National Gallery, Cape Town

argument.”² This whimsical element is balanced by an exceptional amount of incidental detail, including an unusually extensive background townscape.

1. Birmingham collection 1939, p. 94 (529’27).

2. De Lisle 1904, p. 80.

48.

Phyllis and Demophoön

1870

Watercolor and bodycolor, 36 x 18 in. (91.5 x 45.8 cm)

Signed and dated: EBJ 1870; on verso, in the artist’s hand: *Phyllis and Demophoon* / “dic mihi quid feci? nisi non sapienter amavi” / E. Burne Jones / The Grange / Northend / Fulham

PROVENANCE: Bought from the artist by Frederick Leyland; John Bibby; presented by the Feeney Charitable Trust, 1916

EXHIBITED: Old Water-Colour Society, London, 1870, no. 154; New Gallery 1892–93, no. 17; Arts Council 1975–76, no. 117

Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery (1916P37)

BIRMINGHAM ONLY

If *The Merciful Knight* (cat. no. 26) had shown how far Burne-Jones had come in his early years, *Phyllis and Demophoön*, the most important of his exhibits at the Old Water-Colour Society in 1870, was a milestone of equal significance in his full maturity. A romantic subject taken from a classical source is painted in an appropriate combination of styles: the late Pre-Raphaelite technique of dense, dry-brush, suffused watercolor, with attention to flat decorative detail, coalesces with an overt homage to a High Renaissance ideal of figure painting from the nude.

The subject of this important work occurs in Chaucer’s “Legend of Goode Wimmen,” but significantly, Burne-Jones identifies its earlier origin in Ovid’s *Heroides*. Phyllis, daughter of the King of Thrace, falls in love with Demophoön, son of Theseus, who is staying at her father’s court. He departs the court, but promises to return. When he fails to keep his promise, Phyllis kills herself, and is turned by the gods into an almond tree. On his eventual return, Demophoön remorsefully embraces the tree, from which Phyllis emerges to forgive and reclaim her faithless lover.¹



A tiny thumbnail sketch exists for the composition (William Morris Gallery, Walthamstow), in which Phyllis is slightly more dominant; two fine studies for the male torso (London art market) show the development of the figure of Demophoön, whose head is that of a studio model. Phyllis has the unmistakable features of Maria Zambaco, with whom Burne-Jones had been infatuated since 1868 (see cat. no. 49). Her depiction in such a scene as this, with its poignant Latin tag—"Tell me what I have done, except to love unwisely?"—has provoked much discussion on the psychological implications of the picture, which at the very least must have served as an act of catharsis in exorcising the artist's feelings of guilt toward his wife as well as toward his mistress.²

Whether the nature of Burne-Jones's relationship with Maria was widely known is uncertain, but there was much else about *Phyllis and Demophoön* that fueled controversy and provided a target for criticism in the art press. "This painter has been a wonder to critics," wrote F. G. Stephens in the *Athenaeum*, "and of course much abused by unmitigated adoration from one side, and cruel and unmerciful contumely from the other."³ While allowing that there might be "parts in this picture which no other artist could have painted," the critic for the *Art Journal* regarded the figures as "rather too green for flesh and blood, at least of ordinary mortals." The *Illustrated London News* went further, condemning the picture as "nothing but a stony, bloodless figment of the fancy—something which, like the amatory poetry of the Swinburne school, might be loathsome were it not for its fantastic unreality."⁴ Stephens did not agree, finding "more than enough to delight one in the Giorgionesque tones of the flesh of Demophoön and the landscape background."

In the *Times*, Tom Taylor found "no characterisation of sex between the Demophoön and the Phyllis," and considered that "the idea of a love-chase, with a woman follower, is not pleasant."⁵ To the concept of female sexual assertiveness was added a simpler affront to decency in the depiction of Demophoön's genitalia, deliberately not covered by adjacent flowing drapery. Accounts differ, but it seems that the Society received an anonymous letter of objection. The thin line between acceptable nudity and scandalous nakedness had recently been debated with respect to Leighton's oil painting *Helios and Rhodos*, a more thoroughly classical but no less passionate subject that had been shown at the Royal Academy in 1869, and the Committee understandably must have wished to avoid another fuss.⁶ The Society's President, Frederick Tayler (1802–1889), was deputed to visit Burne-Jones, who "declined to make some slight alteration in removable chalk, and withdrew not only the picture from the walls, but himself from the Society."⁷

Already sold to the Liverpool collector Frederick Leyland, the work was duly taken down. Although the circumstances could hardly have been more uncomfortable—salt was rubbed in the wound by a suggestion that the Orientalist painter Carl Haag (1820–1915) might lend something to fill the space—Burne-Jones was probably relieved to have the opportunity

to relinquish the demands of annual public exhibition. His experimental and instinctive use of a heavy admixture of watercolor, bodycolor, and gum must in any case have been anathema to the purists among the Society's older members, who would have agreed with the *Art Journal*'s critic that his work "in substance and surface might almost be mistaken for oil." "The conviction that my work is antagonistic to yours," Burne-Jones wrote to the Society in a formal letter of resignation, "has grown in my mind for some years past, and cannot have been felt only on my side." He had received some support, notably from Frederick Burton (who honorably carried out his threat to resign in sympathy), but concluded that "in so grave a matter as this, I cannot allow any feeling except the necessity for absolute freedom in my work to move me."⁸

1. It has been pointed out that while there are various sources for the blossoming of the almond tree on Demophoön's return, the reemergence of Phyllis appears to be the artist's invention; neither element is mentioned in Ovid or Chaucer. See Lady Lever Art Gallery collection 1994, p. 18.
2. See, for instance, Jan Marsh, *The Pre-Raphaelite Sisterhood* (New York, 1985), pp. 281–82.
3. *Athenaeum*, April 30, 1870, p. 586.
4. *Art Journal*, June 1870, p. 173, and *Illustrated London News*, April 30, 1870, p. 459, respectively.
5. *Times* (London), April 27, 1870, p. 4.
6. See Alison Smith, "The Nude at Public Exhibition, 1866–1870," *The Victorian Nude* (Manchester, 1996), chap. 4.
7. J. L. Roget, *A History of the "Old" Water-Colour Society* (London, 1891), vol. 2, p. 117.
8. *Memorials*, vol. 2, p. 12.

49.

Maria Zambaco

1870

Bodycolor, 30 x 21³/₄ in. (76.3 x 55 cm)

Signed, inscribed, and dated on cartellino: *Mary Aetat XXVI August 7th 1870 EBJ pinxit at lower right: E.B.J. 1870*

PROVENANCE: *Euphrosyne Cassavetti; by descent to A. J. S. Cassavetti, sold 1965*

Clemens-Sels-Museum, Neuss (Ma 1968/106)

Maria Cassavetti (1843–1914) was born into one of the merchant families at the center of the Greek community in London. Her marriage in 1861 to a Greek doctor in Paris, Demetrius Zambaco, failed in 1865, and she returned to London with her two young children. Along with her cousins Aglaia Coronio and Marie Spartali, whose beauty, wealth, and independence of mind made them popular in London art circles, she was known as one of the Three Graces. Each modeled for Rossetti. Maria's own ambitions as an artist were chiefly fulfilled in the 1880s, when she was a successful medalist and low-relief sculptor. She also narrowly failed to become one of Rodin's assistants.¹

The commission by her mother, Euphrosyne, for a watercolor (one of the versions of *Cupid Finding Psyche*, cat. no. 38) led to a



meeting with Burne-Jones in 1866. Over the next three years Maria was successively his model, his pupil, and eventually, as he became increasingly infatuated with her, his lover. Her striking features—"[hers] was a wonderful head," he wrote, "neither profile was like the other quite, and the full face was different again"²—appear in many drawings from these years, which Burne-Jones used for paintings from *Beatrice* (private collection) and *Phyllis and Demophoön* (cat. no. 48; both exhibited in 1870) to *Pygmalion and the Image* (cat. no. 87c) and *Nimue* (cat. no. 65). She read Homer and Virgil to him as he worked in the garden studio at The Grange, to which the Burne-Joneses moved at the end of 1867, and perhaps expected a final commitment, which he was apparently unable to make.

Unwilling to leave his heroically loyal wife, Georgie, and their two children, Burne-Jones decided to break with Maria; his plan to escape abroad for a while in the company of William Morris precipitated an extraordinary scene, described by Rossetti in a letter of January 1869 to Ford Madox Brown: "Poor old Ned's affairs have come to a smash altogether, and he and Topsy [Morris], after the most dreadful to-do, started for Rome suddenly, leaving the Greek damsel beating up the quarters of all his friends for him and howling like Cassandra. . . . She provided herself with laudanum for two at least, and insisted on their winding up matters in Lord Holland's Lane. Ned didn't see it, when she tried to drown herself in the water

in front of Browning's house &c.—bobbies collaring Ned who was rolling with her on the stones to prevent it, and God knows what else."³

The storm having broken, both parties eventually recovered their senses, and Burne-Jones was able to continue his work, exorcising his passion for Maria by incorporating her face into some of his most memorable images. Euphrosyne Cassavetti remained a friend and patron, and this allegorical portrait of her daughter was painted as a birthday present in the summer of 1870 (while Georgie and the children were on holiday with George Eliot and G. H. Lewes at Whitby).⁴ It is signed and dated on the arrow of Cupid, whose presence implicitly identifies the model as Venus; she holds white dittany (in floral symbolism, representing passion) and her book contains a miniature image of *Le Chant d'Amour* (cat. no. 30). The entire portrait carries reminiscences of two oil paintings of 1868 by Rossetti of Jane Morris (also emblematic of an illicit relationship), *The Blue Silk Dress* (Society of Antiquaries, Kelmscott Manor) and *Mariana* (Aberdeen Art Gallery).

1. See Philip Attwood, "Maria Zambaco: *Femme Fatale* of the Pre-Raphaelites," *Apollo*, July 1986, pp. 31–37.

2. Letter to Helen Gaskell, January 1893, quoted in Fitzgerald 1975, p. 114.

3. Rossetti, *Letters*, vol. 2 (1965), p. 685.

4. Eileen Cassavetti, "The Fatal Meeting, the Fruitful Passion," *Antique Collector*, March 1989, p. 42.

The “Seven Blissfullest Years”

Despite many outward signs of success, Burne-Jones's career had reached a crisis by the end of the 1860s. His personal life was battered by his affair with Maria Zambaco, and he was suffering from an acute sense of artistic isolation. “Every year,” he wrote, he seemed to find himself “more alone” professionally, and although he worked harder than ever, he could not escape a “miserable feeling” that he had lost his way as a painter.¹ “I suppose I have done something,” he informed G. F. Watts, “but I look in vain for it; and about every fifth day I fall into despair. . . . Yesterday it culminated and I walked about like an exposed impostor.”²

His relations with the Old Water-Colour Society no doubt played their part. Outside criticism did not worry him, but he was hurt by the hostility shown by some fellow members. Matters came to a head in 1870, when objections were raised to the male nude in *Phyllis and Demophoön* (cat. no. 48) and he was asked to withdraw the picture. He agreed, waited until the exhibition was over, and then resigned.

Harder to bear, however, was a lack of rapport with those who had once seemed allies. The rather limited aesthetic of abstract classicism ultimately failed to satisfy him, just as it failed to satisfy Whistler. But Whistler did at least continue to use musical titles to stress his preoccupation with formal values. Burne-Jones, who actually had a much greater knowledge and understanding of music than Whistler, preferred to relate his pictures to it by making many of his figures sing, play musical instruments, or listen to music being performed. It was a more literal form of reference, and basically a contradiction in terms, evoking mood and even admitting an element of symbolism. Ruskin's moralizing and the priorities of Aestheticism may have been complementary forces in shaping Burne-Jones's development, but ultimately they were opposed; and there is a sense in which the battle for the artist's soul had been won by Ruskin—at least for the time being.

Yet Ruskin himself now let Burne-Jones down. In the summer of 1871, as the first incumbent of the recently instituted Slade Professorship at Oxford, he delivered a lecture in which, still harping on the theme of “dramatic excitement,” he launched a savage attack on Michelangelo, frequently refer-

ring to the drawings by the master which are one of the glories of the university collection. It was a mischievous and intemperate act and many were outraged, including Poynter, who was Ruskin's fellow Slade Professor at University College, London, and William Blake Richmond, who was to succeed Ruskin in the Oxford chair in 1879. Burne-Jones, too, was appalled, for by now Michelangelo was one of his greatest heroes. Indeed, his friendship with Ruskin was never quite the same again, surviving at the level of personal affection but losing a certain element of intellectual respect. Nor was this the only intimacy to suffer at this time. Burne-Jones's relations with Rossetti deteriorated sadly after Rossetti's breakdown in June 1872, and even with Morris there was less sympathy than formerly. In 1875 the firm in its original form was to be dissolved, not without recrimination.

Amid all this uncertainty, Italy alone seemed to offer a rock and refuge. The feeling for Michelangelo that made Burne-Jones quarrel with Ruskin was only one symptom of a growing passion for the early Renaissance masters that we have seen him glancing at in Italy in 1859 and taking a more serious interest in since the mid-1860s. There is documentary evidence that his designs for *The Earthly Paradise* were inspired by the anonymous woodcuts illustrating Francesco Colonna's *Hypnerotomachia Poliphili*, first published in Venice in 1499. Another hint of his thinking occurs in a letter written during a family holiday in Oxford in the summer of 1867, in which he asks Fairfax Murray to “mention Mantegna” to him.³ Similarly telling are the entwined figures in *Phyllis and Demophoön*, surely an echo of those of Zephyr and Chloris on the right in Botticelli's *Primavera*, a picture from which he had gone so far as to copy a few details in 1859.

Burne-Jones is an art historian's artist. Time and again he does what art historians wish all their artists would do—make a conscious use of their sources and leave documentary proof of the process. His work also corresponds closely to art-historical phases. Just as his early style reflects the mid-nineteenth-century concern with the Italian Primitives, a movement which may culminate in Ruskin but had many previous exponents, so his work from about 1870 relates to that late-nineteenth-century preoccupation with Botticelli and the

Florentine Renaissance that was to reach its climax in Bernard Berenson and expend itself only in comparatively modern times. Ruskin, as we have seen, had marked the change with his talk about the "Age of the Masters," and indeed went on to make a close study of Botticelli, the results appearing in a series of Slade lectures, "Sandro Botticelli and the Florentine Schools of Engraving," which he gave late in 1872 and published, under the typically recondite title *Ariadne Florentina*, in 1873–76. But Ruskin never outgrew the quasi-religious approach that had characterized those early apologists for the Primitives to whom he was heir—Wilhelm Heinrich Wackenroder, Friedrich Schlegel, Alexis-François Rio, Lord Lindsay, and others. The cult of Botticelli was essentially the creation of the Aesthetic movement and its prophets, who were in fact a little earlier than Ruskin in starting to give it form. Swinburne's pioneering article on Florentine drawings, "Notes on Designs of the Old Masters at Florence," was published in the *Fortnightly Review* in July 1868, having been researched in the Uffizi four years earlier. Walter Pater's famous essay on Botticelli appeared in the same journal in August 1870 and was reprinted with others—on Leonardo, Michelangelo, Pico della Mirandola, and so forth—in his *Studies in the History of the Renaissance*, of 1873.

In Burne-Jones we find the mirror image of this art-historical critique. Swinburne's article is every bit as rich in correspondences as his *Poems and Ballads*. We are constantly reminded of Burne-Jones as he expatiates on Michelangelo's *teste divine*, analyzes the "fair strange faces" of Leonardo and his followers, describes mythological and allegorical subjects as painted by the Florentines, or draws parallels between Benozzo Gozzoli and Chaucer. At one point Swinburne even invokes Burne-Jones's name, comparing a study of a witch by Filippino Lippi to his *Sidonia von Bork* (cat. no. 12). As for Pater, there appears to be no evidence that he and Burne-Jones ever met, although it seems highly likely. Simeon Solomon and Swinburne were friends in common; Pater wrote on Morris and Rossetti; and from 1885 he had a London house in Earl's Terrace, Kensington, only a mile or two from The Grange. But the fact of a meeting is hardly worth establishing; what is more important and we know existed is an appreciation of Pater's work on the part of Burne-Jones. "I recognise so much of myself in this book," he told the Scottish writer William Sharp when they were discussing Pater's philosophical romance *Marius the Epicurean* (1885), "that at times it is almost too personal to me to read without disquietude."⁴

While the theorists were suggesting critical approaches, the pictures themselves were becoming increasingly available. In the 1870s the National Gallery added three major Botticellis and a Mantegna to its existing holdings of these artists. Leyland and Graham were establishing their collections of

Italian paintings, and Burne-Jones's knowledge that his work would be seen in the company of, say, Graham's *Circe* by Dosso Dossi, or *Hylas and the Nymphs* by Piero di Cosimo, or Leyland's four panels from the workshop of Botticelli illustrating Boccaccio's story of Nastagio degli Onesti⁵ must have had an impact on his style. Rossetti was another Botticelli enthusiast, and had acquired a portrait attributed to him in 1867,⁶ while Fairfax Murray began his career as a dealer in the winter of 1871–72, when he paid a long visit to Italy and bought a picture for Murray Marks.⁷ Then there was the flurry of activity surrounding the so-called *Florentine Picture-Chronicle*, an album of fifteenth-century Florentine drawings that was offered to the British Museum by a Parisian dealer in 1873. When negotiations broke down, Ruskin bought the album on the recommendation of Burne-Jones, who copied at least one of the drawings.⁸ Burne-Jones himself owned several Old Masters, including an *Annunciation* from the school of Botticelli which had once belonged to Graham⁹ and a fragment of a *Rape of Europa* attributed to Giorgione, which was given to him by Charles Eliot Norton in 1871.¹⁰ Norton was traveling in Italy at the time, and would also send him photographs of paintings and drawings. "You know what I like," Burne-Jones told him, "all helpful pieces of modelling and sweet head-drawing, and naked by Leonardo and M. Angelo and Raphael—all round, fat babies—O you know so well. I like the Florentine men more than all others. . . . If Ghirlandaio draws sweet girls running, and their dresses blown about, O please not to let me lose one."¹¹

In September 1871 Burne-Jones was ordered by his doctor to take a holiday and impulsively decided to return to Italy, a country he had not seen for nine years. During a three-week tour he revisited Genoa, Florence, Pisa, and Siena, and saw for the first time San Gimignano, Orvieto, and Rome, besides Assisi, Perugia, Cortona, and Arezzo. As on previous visits, he drew from paintings. His favorite artists, he wrote on his return, were now Giotto, Orcagna, Uccello, Piero della Francesca, Mantegna, Signorelli, Botticelli, Michelangelo, and Andrea del Sarto. It is an interesting list. Mantegna, Botticelli, Signorelli, and Michelangelo were to be expected. The inclusion of Piero della Francesca is remarkably original for this date, anticipating the vogue for him in the Post-Impressionist era, while that of Andrea del Sarto seems reactionary, evoking thoughts of Browning. Giotto and Orcagna are, so to speak, "left over" from the "serious talk" with Ruskin, but the great Venetians who had loomed so large in that "talk" are conspicuous by their absence. "I never wanted even to look at Titian," Burne-Jones wrote on his return.¹² "The Raphaels at Rome" also left him cold, and this is a little more surprising. He had been interested in Raphael in the mid-1860s, when he was trying to improve his drawing, absorbing him mainly through the medium of Marcantonio's engravings.

On this journey he seems to have paid more attention than formerly to architecture, decorative motifs, and landscape, in fact anything that might prove useful for a picture. A sketchbook kept at the time is full of such aides-mémoires—streets and alleys in sharp perspective, the masonry of the Golden House of Nero and the Baths of Caracalla, the sinuous shapes of olive trees, curtains hooked up over doorways, ships with picturesquely furled sails, hill towns glimpsed in the distance as he traversed the country by carriage or train.¹³ Everywhere he went he had a profound sense of rediscovering his spiritual roots. “This three short weeks, . . .” he wrote on his return, “has made me live again.” Indeed, he added with characteristic whimsy, “I belong to old Florence, and have brought over to a large mercantile city a collection of fourth-rate Italian pictures, and when the stock is exhausted I shall go back to my native country.”¹⁴ He did go back in the spring of 1873, accompanied as far as Florence by Morris. He then went on to Siena, Bologna, and Ravenna, where he became ill and had to go home. In fact he was never to see Italy again, but the memory of it was enough. “I have brought back a most sweet remembrance,” he wrote at the time. “I may say quite literally that I walk about here and live in Italy.”¹⁵

For seven years after resigning from the Old Water-Colour Society Burne-Jones hardly exhibited. Showing only twice, at the Dudley Gallery in 1872–73, he sold his work privately to a few devoted patrons, mainly Leyland and Graham. He later

described this period as the “seven blissfullest years of work that I ever had; no fuss, no publicity, no teasing about exhibiting, no getting pictures done against time.”¹⁶ Freed from these professional burdens, he was able to cultivate his talent and resolve the problems that had once driven him to “despair.” His sheer productivity is the best evidence that he had found his way at last. “I have sixty pictures, oil and water, in my studio,” he told Norton, “and every day I would gladly begin a new one.”¹⁷ His autograph work record for 1872 has no fewer than thirty-four entries, and many embrace a whole series of individual designs.¹⁸ They include some of the most important paintings and decorative projects of the future: *The Beguiling of Merlin* (cat. no. 64), *The Days of Creation* (fig. 79), *Le Chant d’Amour* (cat. no. 84), *The Golden Stairs* (cat. no. 109), the Briar Rose paintings (cat. nos. 55, 58), *The Garden of Pan* (cat. no. 120), *Pan and Psyche* (cat. no. 103), *The Masque of Cupid* (cat. nos. 60–62), *The Car of Love* (Cecil Higgins Art Gallery and Museum, Bedford), *The Sirens* (cat. no. 157), the Orpheus designs (cat. nos. 126–128), and George Howard’s Cupid and Psyche frieze (cat. nos. 40a–1).

Italy had given him the confidence and the sense of direction he needed; small wonder, then, that his work was never more Italianate than at this time. The great example is the Troy triptych, conceived in 1870. A series of narrative and allegorical paintings representing the fall of Troy were to be set in an elaborate Renaissance-style frame of colored marble, with a richly carved entablature and freestanding bronze putti at

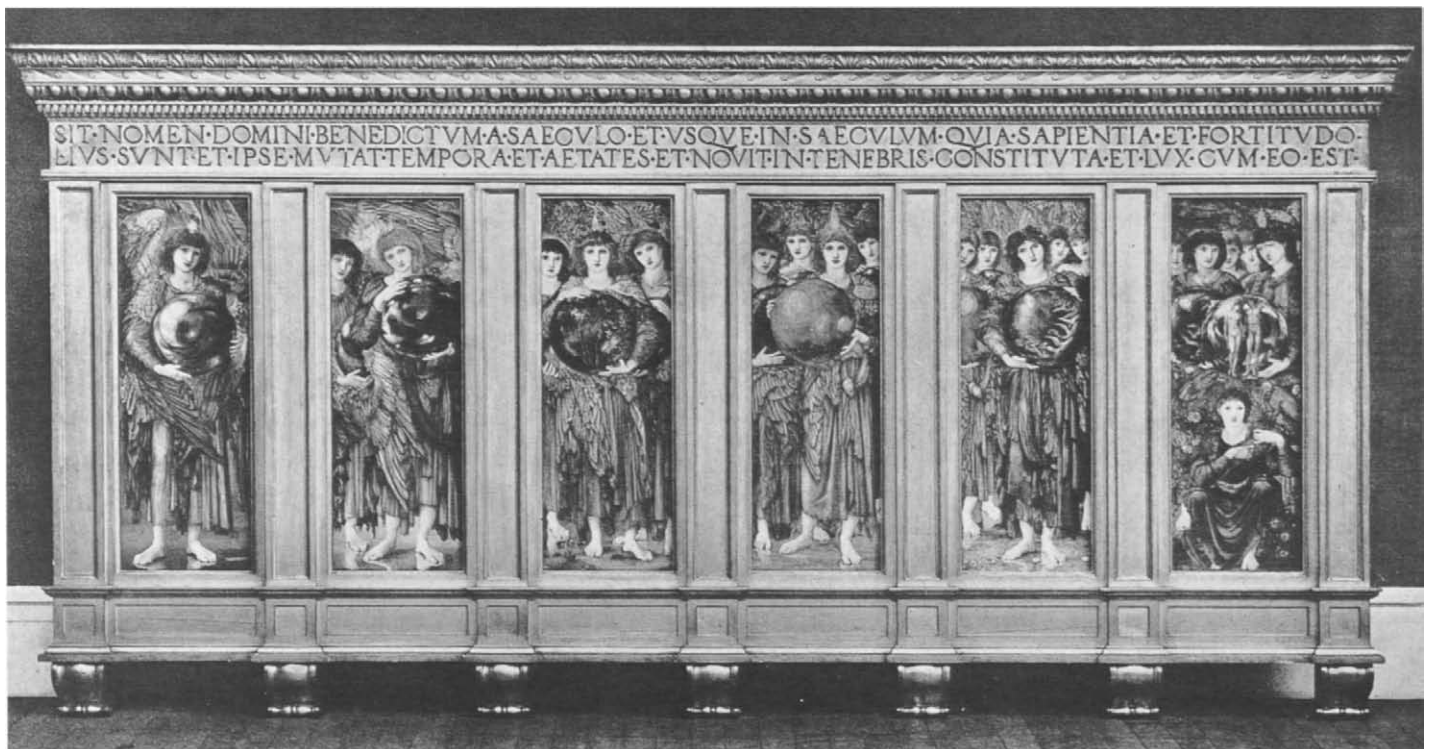


Figure 79. Edward Burne-Jones, *The Days of Creation*, 1872–76. Watercolor with gold paint, each 40 x 13½ in. (101.6 x 34.3 cm). Fogg Art Museum, Cambridge, Mass.

the bases of the pilasters which enclose or separate the three main panels. Drapery, foliage, and “chaplets of jewels” were to be festooned above “in the Crivelli manner,”¹⁹ while fruit and leaves were strewn about the broad ledges above and below the predella. Opinion is divided as to whether an unfinished picture at Birmingham (cat. no. 50), painted partly by assistants, is the triptych itself or a large sketch that shows how it would have looked if carried out in three dimensions (in which case the festoons and fruit would presumably have been arranged by the mistress of the household or some artistic parlor maid). But in any case the project proved too ambitious to be realized.

It did, however, enjoy the same sort of vicarious life as many of the *Earthly Paradise* designs, several of its component parts being developed as individual pictures. All showed the impact of Italy. *The Feast of Peleus* (cat. no. 51), taken from the predella, evokes Italian art at its most sylvan and idyllic. *Venus Discordia* (cat. no. 54) echoes Pollaiuolo, Signorelli, and Raphael, while *The Wheel of Fortune* (cat. no. 52) expresses the artist’s ardent response to Michelangelo. All these pictures, moreover, owe something to his study of Italian architecture and landscape, as many more would do in the future. The serpentine branches of the may tree in *The Beguiling of Merlin* (cat. no. 64)—so aptly described by Henry James (1843–1916) as the product of “a vast deal of ‘looking’ on the painter’s part”²⁰—are based on the sketches of olive trees made in 1871, just as the background of *The Annunciation* (cat. no. 104) is developed from notes of doorways, alleys, and courtyards.

During his 1871 visit to Italy Burne-Jones also paid close attention to physiognomy, noting, for instance, that the Genoese were “very handsome,” the Florentines “bright and interesting,” and the Perugians “thin-nosed and lipped, very like Perugino saints.” The Orvietans were a “sad-looking people, with beautiful eyes and expressions,” but the most beautiful of all were the Romans: “No men or women on earth look out of their eyes as they do.”²¹ No doubt these observations added yet another ingredient to the formation of his unmistakable type, overlaying Ruskin’s theory about Vital Beauty in man being concentrated in his features, his own experience of copying Luini, Swinburne’s lyrical descriptions of Leonardo’s faces—“full of [an] indefinable grace and grave mystery . . . touched by the shadow of an obscure fate,” and perhaps Pater’s famous account of the *Mona Lisa* herself—her beauty “the deposit . . . of fantastic reveries and exquisite passions,” expressive of “the soul with all its maladies,” and so “etched and moulded” by “the thoughts and experience of the world” that she seems “older than the rocks among which she sits.”²²

Burne-Jones could continue this line of research in London, where Italian models found ready employment in artists’ studios. Two of the most popular were Alessandro di



Figure 80. Edward Burne-Jones. Study of head for *Sponsa de Libano*, 1891. Chalk on paper, 13 $\frac{3}{8}$ x 10 $\frac{7}{8}$ in. (34 x 27.7 cm). Lady Lever Art Gallery, Port Sunlight (see also illus. on p. 188)

Marco and Antonia Caiva, whose name Burne-Jones inscribed on a drawing—a nude rather than a head study—in the exhibition (cat. no. 110). This is extremely unusual. He almost never identified his models, and it is generally unwise to hazard a guess on the subject. There is an understandable temptation to discern the features of, say, the glamorous Maria Zambaco in some given drawing, and it is true that she and other friends and relatives—Georgie and Margaret Burne-Jones, May Morris, Fanny Cornforth, Marie Spartali, Frances Horner, and so on—can sometimes be recognized. But the vast majority of Burne-Jones’s sitters were professional models who remain anonymous. We shall never know the name of the “little Houndsditch Jewess, self-possessed, mature and worldly, and only about twelve years old,” who sat with such abandon for the heads of the winds in *Sponsa de Libano* (fig. 80; see also illus. on p. 188).²³ Equally elusive is the “new model” he discovered toward the end of his life—“a curious type,” Graham Robertson recalled, “quite away from his usual face. She had very small eyes which gave her a rather sly expression, and she evidently interested him (pictorially) very much.”²⁴ Even if we know their names, Burne-Jones’s models cannot necessarily be identified. Who would recognize Bessie Keene and her mother, two professional models he often used; or Edith Gellibrand, an actress (stage name Edith Chester),

who is said to appear in *The Golden Stairs* (cat. no. 109); or Reserva, “a tall, dark girl of gipsy blood” who was also on the stage, Luke Ionides noticing her in the chorus of *The Yeoman of the Guard*?²⁵ We should never underestimate Burne-Jones’s extraordinary capacity to impose his ideal on his models. “I have often watched him drawing from the life,” Robertson wrote, “and so strong was his personal vision that, as I gazed, Antonelli the model began to look very like Burne-Jones’s study, although the study never began to look like Antonelli.”²⁶

The fate of the Troy triptych was typical. As Norton had noted in 1869, Burne-Jones’s studio overflowed with work at every stage of development. His astonishingly fertile imagination was constantly throwing out more ideas than he could possibly resolve at the time; and because he liked to work slowly, building up his pictures by a series of painstaking processes and laying them aside when some other task claimed his attention, they often took years to complete. *Le Chant d’Amour* (cat. no. 84) and *Laus Veneris* (cat. no. 63), the two great Venetian subjects exhibited in 1878, had been many years on the easel and were based on designs evolved in the heyday of the Venetian style, the early 1860s. *The Golden Stairs* (cat. no. 109) was conceived in the creative outpouring following his return from Italy in 1871 but not finished until 1880. Nine years elapsed between the designing and the completion of *King Cophetua and the Beggar Maid* (cat. no. 112), while *The Mill* (cat. no. 111) was twelve years in gestation and *The Garden of Pan* (cat. no. 120) fifteen. *Love Leading the Pilgrim* (cat. no. 74), Burne-Jones’s last major work to reach completion, was designed in the early 1870s, begun in 1877, and only finished twenty years later. Graham Robertson, who did not consider it “one of his best pictures,” remembered it hanging “unfinished (and then very beautiful) in his studio for many years,” and being “completed hurriedly for exhibition when he found himself with nothing else to show.”²⁷ This is true only up to a point, since there is abundant evidence that the artist worked on the canvas for two years before it was exhibited in 1897, paying the most scrupulous attention to its linear rhythms. Even this, however, is not the ultimate example of the way his pictures matured, like wine, over long periods of time. That accolade must go to *The Prioress’s Tale* (cat. no. 43), designed in the late 1850s within a year or two of his settling in London, started a decade later in 1869, and only completed when nearly another thirty years had elapsed. In fact it was one of the very last paintings he exhibited; it was still hanging on the walls of the New Gallery when he died.

Needless to say, many pictures were never completed at all. The three predella panels for the Troy triptych—*Venus Concordia* (City Museum and Art Gallery, Plymouth), *Venus Discordia* (cat. no. 54), and *The Feast of Peleus* (cat. no. 51)—were all recast as independent works on an ambitious scale,

only to remain unfinished at his death. The same fate befell *The Sirens* (cat. no. 157) and *The Car of Love*, products, like *The Golden Stairs*, of that year of unparalleled fecundity, 1872. Arthur Balfour never saw the Perseus series (cat. nos. 88–98) brought to full fruition, even though he commissioned the paintings in 1875, when the artist still had twenty-three years to live. Only four of the final canvases were completed, although the designs of the rest are well known in other forms.

This again was typical. The long periods of gestation would often involve the creation of large-scale studies or cartoons. When the picture was finished, these might be completed as independent versions, or another version, usually larger, might be painted anyway. The Briar Rose paintings are the classic example. Based on designs conceived in 1864, they were first cast in the form of a series of three small canvases, executed in 1871 (cat. nos. 55, 58). They were then almost immediately recommenced on a much larger scale, with an additional composition. But since three of these larger paintings were abandoned and completed only after the “definitive” set had been exhibited in 1890, there are in fact three series, two still together and one (lacking the fourth subject) scattered (cat. nos. 56, 57). Moreover, two of the compositions exist in other trial versions, further bedeviling a subject of extreme complexity which has been satisfactorily sorted out only in recent years.

The wishes of patrons naturally played a large part in the production of different versions. Graham was particularly inclined to commission new treatments of compositions he admired, sometimes receiving a masterpiece (cat. nos. 64, 84) but occasionally, it must be admitted, finding himself palmed off with a lackluster performance. *Hope* (cat. no. 163) is another example, being painted for a Boston patron twenty-five years after the original was completed. But Burne-Jones’s passion for revising his designs (one, incidentally, which he shared with his mentor Watts) could also be self-driven. *The Wheel of Fortune* (cat. no. 52), which is known to have been one of his favorites, exists in at least six versions, all very different in scale and finish. When *Phyllis and Demophoön* (cat. no. 48) was recast twelve years after its completion as *The Tree of Forgiveness* (cat. no. 114), no patron seems to have been involved. The picture was bought by Agnew’s, the dealers who were to play an increasingly large part in marketing Burne-Jones’s work, and was soon sold to William Imrie, another Liverpool shipowner, who was no doubt inspired by Leyland. The composition had been considerably revised. Gone were Maria Zambaco’s features and with them the element of autobiography, while Demophoön’s nudity, the cause of such offense in 1870, had been judiciously modified, and the picture had acquired a Michelangesque gravitas which the original lacks. Many versions of Burne-Jones’s pictures undergo a similar



Figure 81. Edward Burne-Jones, *Fides*, 1872. Watercolor, 70 $\frac{1}{8}$ x 24 $\frac{7}{8}$ in. (178.1 x 63.2 cm). Based on a cartoon for stained glass in Christ Church Cathedral, Oxford, 1871. Vancouver Art Gallery



Figure 82. Edward Burne-Jones, *Sibylla Delphica*, 1874-86. Oil on panel, 60 $\frac{1}{8}$ x 23 $\frac{3}{4}$ in. (152.8 x 60.3 cm). Based on a cartoon for stained glass in Jesus College Chapel, Cambridge, 1873. Manchester City Art Gallery

metamorphosis, the original design being reinterpreted in terms of his current style.

To catalogue a picture by Burne-Jones is seldom simple. Quite apart from questions of dating and versions (which may well have become confused in the course of time), there will often be a relationship with some piece of decorative art. If many paintings are based on illustrations to *The Earthly Paradise*, others relate to stained glass, tiles, tapestry, furniture

decoration, and even mosaic. Of the pictures just mentioned, *Le Chant d'Amour* and *The Prioress's Tale* are based on designs conceived for painted furniture, *Laus Veneris* and the Briar Rose series are connected with tiles, *Love Leading the Pilgrim* develops a composition evolved for needlework, and *Hope* has its point of origin in a cartoon for stained glass. Burne-Jones's readiness to blur the boundaries between easel painting and decorative design naturally had profound repercussions for

both, although there was an important difference. Because the designs for applied art nearly always came first, the effect in their case was general; they simply tended to be more pictorial than they would have been if they had not been designed by a painter. On the other hand, the paintings which derive from decorative design bear signs of this in a much more specific sense. Indeed, the connection helps to explain some of the most salient features of Burne-Jones's art. His fondness for painting pictures in series owes much to his experience of designing sets of subjects for illustrational or decorative purposes. The Pygmalion series (cat. nos. 87a–d) is based on *The Earthly Paradise* illustrations that he actually executed, and the Perseus series (cat. nos. 88–98) is anticipated by a poem in Morris's cycle for which Burne-Jones drew up a list of designs before the illustrated edition was abandoned.²⁸ The Briar Rose series stems from one of the sets of tiles made as overmantels for Birket Foster's house at Witley, and *Love Leading the Pilgrim* (cat. no. 74) belongs to a group of paintings based on a needlework frieze designed for the decoration of Rounton Grange, Northallerton, the house Philip Webb built for the wealthy Tyneside iron-master Lowthian Bell. The Perseus and Saint George series were conceived as room decorations in themselves. In fact, it seems almost an oversight that Burne-Jones failed to paint easel versions of some of the designs for the story of Orpheus and Eurydice, which he made in 1879 to adorn the grand piano that Graham commissioned for his daughter Frances (cat. no. 125).

No doubt Burne-Jones would not have been so addicted to series—whether in the context of illustration, decoration, or painting—if they had not satisfied his phenomenal powers of invention. There are times when his vision has an almost cinematic quality; it was as though he found it easier to visualize a subject in terms of a series of frames than as a single, all-embracing image. In much the same way, it was his penchant for compositions based on a single figure—that tendency so encouraged by Ruskin with his talk of “beautiful things or creatures” represented “in perfect repose” but replete with allegorical significance—that made him so ready to paint easel versions of standing figures conceived to fill the narrow upright lights of stained-glass windows. Reference has already been made to *Hope* (cat. no. 163) and to the watercolors of girls gathering flowers based on the glass at South Kensington. *Saint George* (cat. no. 85) belongs to the same category, and there are many other examples: *Caritas*, *Fides* (fig. 81), *Temperantia*, *The Days of Creation* (fig. 79), paintings of the Cumaean and Delphic Sibyls (fig. 82). In fact, Burne-Jones's fondness for this format led him to adopt it for paintings which had no connection with stained glass: Leyland's Seasons, *The Wheel of Fortune* (cat. no. 52), *The Depths of the Sea* (cat. no. 119).

There were risks involved in Burne-Jones's refusal to draw firm lines between his painting and decorative design. In his

invaluable catalogue of William Morris's stained glass, A. C. Sewter argues that many of Burne-Jones's later windows are too pictorial to function effectively within their architectural context,²⁹ and similar questions about surface integrity could be raised in relation to the tapestries that he began to design for Morris in the 1880s. That the pictures themselves might suffer from the connection was implied by Henry James when he complained of their “element of painful, niggling embroidery—the stitch-by-stitch process that had come at last to beg the *painter* question altogether.”³⁰ Certainly there are a few pictures that hover uneasily between the two spheres. A case in point is an early version of *Perseus and the Graiae* (cat. no. 89). Described by Graham Robertson as “a rather unsuccessful experiment in combining oil-painting with thin sheets of metal nailed on to the panel,”³¹ it was panned by the critics when exhibited in 1878 and seems, perhaps significantly, to have disappeared. But on the whole the process of interpenetration was mutually advantageous. Few would dispute that Burne-Jones was the most distinguished designer of stained glass in the Victorian revival of the medium; and it is his pictorial sense that enables him to evoke images which hold the imagination and interest in a way that no other designer achieves. Only his peers in the Morris firm can stand comparison, and none of them was so prolific.

The contrary influence was no less salutary; his decorative work gave him an awareness of the proprieties and limitations of painting which too many of his academic colleagues tended to forget. The “element of . . . niggling embroidery” which James deplored could, at its best, be a highly expressive use of texture and pattern. Fairfax Murray remembered him “patting” the paint “with a flat brush” to create an agreeable surface.³² The curtains behind the angel and the Virgin in the altarpiece for Saint Paul's Church, Brighton (cat. no. 10), have patterns “stirred” in the thick and soupy paint, and the rich texture of Venus's dress in *Laus Veneris* (cat. no. 63) is achieved by stamping it all over with a circular punch in the underpainting which, when dry, is glazed with brilliant orange. This picture is also an outstanding example of an approach to color which may have been encouraged by designing for stained glass and tapestry, a use of “shot” tones to maintain a color scheme arbitrarily across a large watercolor or canvas. It should be remembered, however, that nearly all the stained-glass cartoons that Burne-Jones produced for Morris, whether in pencil, charcoal, or sepia wash, are in monochrome, Morris having sole responsibility for the windows' color.

Perhaps the most consistent expression of Burne-Jones's decorative tendency is an extreme sensitivity to the question of spatial recession. His favorite composition, repeated endlessly with variations, was a figure or group of figures in the

foreground plane “hanging” on a screen drawn across the middle distance—a curtain, a rose pergola, a piece of architecture or landscape. He was happy to introduce distant figures if they could be fitted into this simple plane system, as in the case of the knights seen through the window in *Laus Veneris* (cat. no. 63) or the Michelangelesque bathers in *The Mill* (cat. no. 111), but anything more complex worried him. Having quoted his remark that “figures diminished by distance are a bore in tapestry,” Georgie added: “Even in painted pictures Edward shrank from the break in unity caused by any great difference of size in figures; and when, in the background of ‘Avalon’ [fig. 107], the laws of perspective obliged him to make one of the watching maidens a good deal less than the others, he was uneasy till he had taken her out again.”³³

One way in which his involvement with decoration certainly impinged on his painting was an increasing tendency to work on a large scale. He began his career as a miniaturist, making painstaking pen-and-ink drawings. Indeed, he could always revert to this scale, and remained a keen student of medieval illumination to the end of his life. But the trend toward larger proportions, already noted in such works of the 1860s as *The Merciful Knight* (cat. no. 26) and *The Wine of Circe* (fig. 24), continued, until, with such great “machines” as *The Golden Stairs* (cat. no. 109), *King Cophetua and the Beggar Maid* (cat. no. 112), and *Love Leading the Pilgrim* (cat. no. 74) behind him, he died working on his two largest canvases, *The Car of Love*, which filled an entire end wall of the studio he built at the bottom of the garden at The Grange in 1882 (fig. 83), and *The Sleep of Arthur in Avalon* (fig. 107), so colossal that a special studio had to be taken for it on Campden Hill. It seems to have been in the 1870s, following his last two visits to Italy, that he came to see his pictures as poor substitutes for the great public works that he would have been commissioned to paint if he had lived in a society with the priorities of Renaissance Florence. The subject made him rather emotional. “The chance of doing public work seldom comes to me,” he lamented in 1888; “If I could I would work only in public buildings and in choirs and places where they sing.”³⁴ Still wilder was his comment, “I want big things to do and vast spaces, and for common people to see them and say Oh!—only Oh!”³⁵ Subjects of corresponding ambition increasingly filled his mind. *The Car of Love*, *The Masque of Cupid* (cat. nos. 60, 61), and *The Sirens* (cat. no. 157) were all conceived in 1872 as great lifesize compositions “which above all others I desire to paint, and count my chief designs for some years to come.” A fourth idea, later to find reduced expression in *The Garden of Pan* (cat. no. 120), was “a picture of the beginning of the world, with Pan and Echo and sylvan gods, and a forest full of centaurs, and a wild background of woods, mountains and rivers.”³⁶ It seems that this might have become part of a still

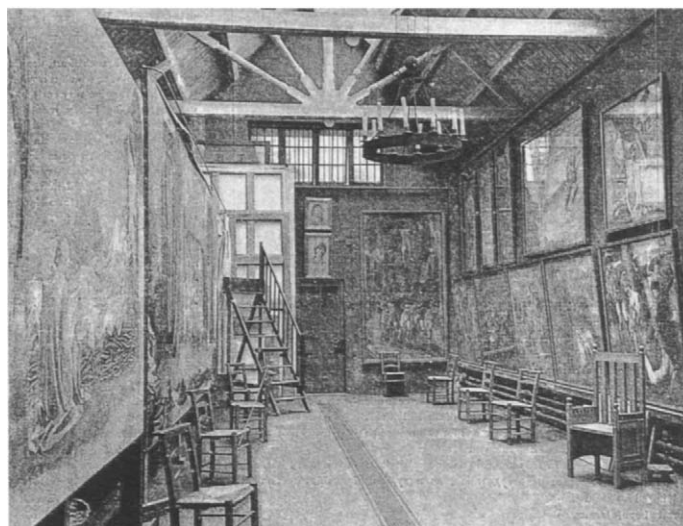


Figure 83. The garden studio at The Grange, erected 1882 (see also fig. 1)

larger project, never to be realized, in which “the whole history of the world” would have been represented in terms of a series of paintings of the Four Ages of Man.³⁷

Burne-Jones’s quixotic notion of painting such a scheme in a public building for the edification of “common people” was a late example of an idea that had obsessed many nineteenth-century artists. The Nazarene painter Peter Cornelius had achieved something of the kind in Munich in the 1820s and 1830s, while in Paris, then or a little later, mural schemes symbolizing the history of the human spirit had been attempted by Ingres, Delacroix, Delaroche, Chenavard, and others. Victor Hugo and Balzac had offered literary parallels, and there was a philosophical dimension in the “positivism” of Auguste Comte and Herbert Spencer, with its vivid sense of evolutionary progress. In England, where grandiose artistic statements were instinctively distrusted and no real mural tradition existed, the concept had never gained much credence, but G. F. Watts, who had seen some of the Parisian schemes on his way to Italy in 1843 and was well aware of positivist thinking, had long dreamed of painting his House of Life, a building which he would fresco with nothing less than a symbolic history of mankind in relation to the elemental forces which had shaped the cosmos. Burne-Jones must have heard his mentor speak of this vaulting and totally impracticable ambition, and no doubt it encouraged him to think along similar lines. His conception of human progress in terms of the Four Ages was anticipated in the iconography of Watts’s scheme and several of its Continental counterparts. Moreover, Watts too was in the habit of painting enormous canvases by way of surrogate murals, devoting them to the cloudy allegories which would, in an ideal world, have made up his House of Life.

In the account book in which he entered the windows and other work he did for Morris, Burne-Jones often made jocular

references to lack of appreciation and inadequate payment.³⁸ These comments are perhaps a little more barbed than they at first appear, but there was never any serious risk that he would stop supplying Morris with stained-glass cartoons. The work was simply too close to his heart. "I love to work in that fettered way," he once said of designing mosaics, "and am better in a prison than in the open air always."³⁹ The comment says much not only about his addiction to all forms of decorative work but about his artistic attitude in general. He may have been a sensualist in his imagery, but stylistically he was an ascetic, eagerly embracing limitations like a monk finding freedom in a cell.

It was not only the stimulus of working within a strict convention that attracted him to stained glass. As he himself knew only too well, there were aspects of his art that were not always easy to reconcile. His feeling for color conflicted with his love of chiaroscuro. His passion for linear rhythm militated against a sense of form so strong that he claimed to rate sculpture higher than painting and even, in whimsical moments, spoke of "taking to sculpture" himself.⁴⁰ But if any of these elements was dominant, it was his sense of line. "As a master of line he was always unequalled," wrote the ever-illuminating Graham Robertson. "To draw was his natural mode of expression—line flowed from him almost without volition."⁴¹ Burne-Jones made himself a painter by force of will, but drawing was a completely spontaneous activity; in a sense he was always the little boy "covering a sheet of foolscap [with figures] almost as quickly as one could have written." It is instructive to compare the drawn and watercolor versions of *The Backgammon Players* (cat. nos. 16, 17), the former a tour de force of astonishing confidence, the latter feeble and hesitant. In later life, it is true, he seems to paint more fluently—in some of the Perseus cartoons (cat. nos. 88–97), for example, but even here he is essentially drawing with a well-charged brush. Robertson was not alone in noting Burne-Jones's instinctive recourse to line, although the response could vary. For Ruskin, "an outline by Burne-Jones is as pure as the lines of engraving on an Etruscan mirror,"⁴² but Henry James complained that his figures "exist too exclusively in surface. Extremely studied and finished in outline, they often strike one as vague in modelling."⁴³

It was the opportunity to indulge this passion, as much as the scope it offered for working in "fetters," that kept Burne-Jones supplying Morris with cartoons year in and year out. His production was at its height in the 1870s, partly because the reorganization of the firm in 1875 meant that from then on he was responsible for all new designs. It has been calculated that in the period 1872–78 he drew over 270 cartoons, an average of thirty-nine a year or one every eight and a half days.⁴⁴ Among them are many of his most remarkable feats in the

field, full of daringly inventive compositions, graceful or heroic figures, passages in which he positively exults in his feeling for abstract line (fig. 84). Georgie describes how he would make these huge drawings in the evening, with family or friends talking or playing music around him: "The strainers . . . were brought downstairs and begun upon very soon after dinner. He made the designs without hesitation. . . . [They] came out upon the paper so quickly that it seemed as if they must have been already there and his hand were only removing a veil. The soft scraping sound of the charcoal in the long smooth lines comes back to me, together with his momentary exclamation of impatience when the stick snapped off short, as it often did, and fell to the ground."⁴⁵ Rudyard Kipling, who often stayed at The Grange as a child while his parents were in India, also remembered these evenings, and how "at bedtime one hastened along the passages, where unfinished cartoons lay against the walls."⁴⁶

Burne-Jones's compulsive need to draw found its most ready outlet in studies for paintings and decorative projects. Hundreds exist, ranging from the roughest and most summary sketches to highly finished composition drawings and exhaustive studies of details—heads, nudes, drapery, armor, musical instruments, and flowers. Studies of the early 1860s tend to be in soft pencil or red chalk, echoing the Venetian taste of the pictures to which they are related, while those of the mid- and late 1860s are often in black and white chalk on buff paper, a technique which Albert Moore, Whistler, Leighton, and Poynter also favored, continuing to use it much longer than Burne-Jones himself. By the early 1870s he had moved on to a more Florentine mode, sometimes working in silverpoint and white bodycolor on a prepared colored ground (cat. no. 110), more often simply adopting a hard pencil to trace the sinuous linear patterns that obsessed him during his Botticellian phase. Other styles would come to the fore in the 1880s and 1890s, but the enthusiasm with which he made these drawings never diminished. The Polish pianist Ignace Jan Paderewski, who sat to him in 1890 for a portrait drawing, recalled him working at it "very rapidly, even violently."⁴⁷ This is somewhat surprising, given that the drawing in question conveys a feeling of the utmost delicacy, but at least it suggests the commitment and passion that Burne-Jones brought to this area of his creative activity. Many of his studies were of course made for purely functional purposes, to record some piece of data needed for a painting, or to test or define a pose or the fall of drapery. Many more, however, have only a tangential relationship with a painting, or indeed take on an independent life of their own. It was as if he were constantly prepared to abandon the stern business of study-making and go off on a sort of graphic revel, captivated by some new pose, the chance arrangement of a piece of drapery, or a fleeting



Figure 84. Edward Burne-Jones, *Saint Catherine with the Angels of Victory and Suffering*, 1878. Pencil, each 80 x 26 in. (203 x 66 cm). Three cartoons for stained glass in Christ Church Cathedral, Oxford. Christ Church, Oxford

expression on the face of a model to whom he was currently in thrall. That he himself saw his drawings as autonomous works of art is clear from the way he treated them, adorning them with decorative titles and signatures, turning them into presentation sheets by giving them, suitably inscribed, to friends, and exhibiting many in his lifetime. If he was one of the greatest Victorian draftsmen, he was also one of the most self-conscious.

1. *Memorials*, vol. 2, p. 23.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 2.

3. *Ibid.*, vol. 1, p. 305.

4. William Sharp, "Edward Burne-Jones," *Fortnightly Review*, August 1898, p. 301.

5. The Dosso Dossi (ca. 1528) is now in the National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., and the Piero di Cosimo (ca. 1485–90) is in the Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford. Three of Leyland's Botticellis (1482–83) are now in the Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid, while the fourth is in a private collection.

6. That of Smeralda Bandinelli, now in the Ionides Collection in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London. The attribution to Botticelli himself has long been doubted. For Rossetti's interest in Botticelli, see William Michael Rossetti, *Dante Gabriel Rossetti: His Family Letters, with a Memoir* (London, 1895), vol. 1, p. 264. Interesting references also occur in John Bryson, ed., *Dante Gabriel Rossetti and Jane Morris: Their Correspondence* (Oxford, 1976).

7. Information kindly supplied by David Elliott.

8. See Arts Council 1975–76, no. 354. The album was eventually acquired by the British Museum in 1889, and was published by Sidney Colvin in 1898 with a dedication to the memory of Burne-Jones, who had recently died.

9. This and three other Old Master paintings that had belonged to Burne-Jones were sold at Sotheby's, London, on December 8, 1926.

10. See *Memorials*, vol. 2, pp. 19–20, and Arts Council 1975–76, no. 350. The fragment was exhibited as by Giorgione in 1894, but has since attracted other attributions. It is now generally considered to be by Palma Vecchio.

11. *Memorials*, vol. 2, p. 21. Burne-Jones's collection of photographs of Old Master paintings and drawings is now in the Library of University College, London.

12. *Ibid.*, vol. 2, pp. 26–27.

13. Arts Council 1975–76, no. 345.

14. *Memorials*, vol. 2, p. 23.

15. For a sketchbook kept on this journey, now in the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, see Arts Council 1975–76, no. 346, and Robinson 1975a.

16. *Memorials*, vol. 2, p. 13.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 23.

18. The notebook containing this year-by-year record is now in the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge.

19. Note by T. M. Rooke in Birmingham collection [1930], p. 31.

20. James 1956, p. 145.

21. *Memorials*, vol. 2, p. 26.

22. First published in *Fortnightly Review*, November 1869, pp. 506–7.

23. *Memorials*, vol. 2, p. 215.

24. Robertson, *Letters*, p. 487.
25. Luke Ionides, *Memories*, facsimile ed., with an afterword by Julia Ionides (Ludlow, 1996), p. 62.
26. Robertson 1931, p. 83.
27. Robertson, *Letters*, p. 284.
28. "The Doom of King Acrisius." A list of proposed designs for this story exists in a sketchbook in the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge.
29. Sewter 1974–75, vol. 1, pp. 51–55.
30. Percy Lubbock, ed., *The Letters of Henry James* (London, 1920), vol. 1, p. 348.
31. Robertson, *Letters*, p. 420.
32. Notes by Charles Fairfax Murray (transcribed by J. R. Holliday) on the techniques of the artists he worked for, now in the Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery.
33. *Memorials*, vol. 2, pp. 331–32.
34. *Ibid.*, p. 13.
35. *Ibid.*
36. Autograph work record, Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge.
37. *Memorials*, vol. 1, pp. 308–9.
38. Now, like the work record, in the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge.
39. *Memorials*, vol. 2, p. 159.
40. See Christian 1991, pp. 77, 90, n. 3.
41. Robertson 1931, p. 84.
42. Ruskin, *Works*, vol. 33 (1908), p. 301.
43. James 1956, p. 164.
44. Sewter 1974–75, vol. 1, p. 46.
45. *Memorials*, vol. 2, pp. 5–6.
46. Rudyard Kipling, *Something of Myself* (London, 1937), p. 13.
47. Ignace Jan Paderewski and Mary Lawton, *The Paderewski Memoirs* (London, 1939), p. 186.

The Story of Troy

Burne-Jones once said, "My holiday is to begin a new picture." Thus in the summer of 1870, as a respite following the furor over the removal of *Phyllis and Demophoön* from the Old Water-Colour Society's walls, Burne-Jones started to plan one of his most ambitious works, one that would comprise both a single new picture on a huge scale and an inter-related series of separate compositions, illustrating the story of Troy.

It remains unclear whether the artist intended to complete the unfinished oil now at Birmingham, or whether it was meant as a vast design for an architectural ensemble that would incorporate paintings and sculpture, as a modern secular version of a Renaissance polyptych altarpiece. Each of its elements was taken further in a variety of ways, the predella subjects eventually giving rise to the most fully completed individual oil paintings: *The Feast of Peleus* (1872–81; cat. no. 51), *The Wheel of Fortune* (1875–83; cat. no. 52), and the pair of canvases *Venus Concordia* and *Venus Discordia* (cat. no. 54), taken up in the 1890s but left unfinished at the artist's death.

50.

The Story of Troy

1870–98

Oil on canvas, 108 x 117½ in. (275 x 298 cm)

PROVENANCE: Presented by Sir Philip Burne-Jones, Mrs. J. W. Mackail, and J. R. Holliday, 1922

EXHIBITED: Polyptyques, Musée du Louvre, Paris, 1990, no. 33

Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery (1922Pr78)

BIRMINGHAM ONLY

The center panel represents the Judgment of Paris, whose choice of Venus over Juno and Minerva as the fairest of the goddesses led to his exile and subsequent encounter with Helen, wife of King Menelaus of Lacedaemon. On the left is depicted Helen Carried off by Paris to Troy under the Protection of Venus, and on the right the denouement of the story, showing Helen Captive in Burning Troy as the city is besieged and sacked by the Greeks under the command of her vengeful husband.¹ The central scene on the predella below shows the Feast of Peleus, at whose wedding to Thetis the story begins; this is flanked by symbolic representations of Venus Concordia and Venus Discordia, appropriate to the passions aroused by love and hate. The four intermediate panels elaborate on the theme of Amor Vincit Omnia: *Fortune*, *Fame Overthrowing Fortune*, *Oblivion Conquering Fame*, and *Love Subduing Oblivion*.²

A note supplied by T. M. Rooke (1842–1942), Burne-Jones's studio assistant from 1867, when the painting came to



50

Birmingham in 1922, reveals that the outline figure work for the main subjects and much of the detail were executed by him. "The *Venus Concordia* and *Venus Discordia* (in the predella) I had to paint in colour, under direction, from the two drawings in hard pencil, then belonging to Sir E. J. Poynter, in the winter of 1871–2." What Rooke calls the "Frieze of Babies struggling," along the entablature, "was outlined in scale for me to put in, but some of them were outlined on the picture in dark blue by the master himself."³ The carefully worked *Feast of Peleus* was identified by Rooke as a reduction made in 1873 "by a young American, Frank Lathrop, a nephew of Nathaniel Hawthorne, and since a decorative painter in America, from the already completed somewhat larger panel in oil [cat. no. 51]."

Further comments suggest that Burne-Jones did indeed have a three-dimensional execution in mind: "festoons and chaplets of jewels were also to be hung from the capitals at top, in the Crivelli manner. . . . The painted metal frames of the main subjects were sought out and studied from plaques in the South Kensington Museum." The four "bronze" medallions on the outer pilasters, of the Trojan princesses Oenone, Iphigenia, Polyxena, and Cassandra, were copied by Rooke from Burne-Jones's drawings. A number of studies by Burne-Jones for the putti at the base of the columns, in the decorative method of black and white chalk on brown paper and stylistically of a later date, confirm Rooke's recollection that "the six bronze babies at the foot of the pillars were added later to diminish the peril . . . that the whole would be cut up for the sake of the separate subjects."⁴ This must have happened when the canvas was returned after having been stored for many years in a studio built by G. F. Watts on the grounds of Little Holland House.⁵

1. A bold cartoon for *Helen Captive in Burning Troy*, largely in white body-color on a red ground, was bought for the Birmingham collection at the first studio sale in 1898 (Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery, 2198).
2. Described as "bronzes," for their possible translation into metalwork, these were copied by Rooke "in a green under-painting, from a set of water-colours on canvas [Watts Gallery, Compton, Surrey] . . . and afterwards brought into tone and colour by the master's hand." Three separate enlargements in oil (lacking *The Wheel of Fortune*) were also made by Rooke, "and only touched on by the originator with suggestions for after-work, which, resulting from the change of scale, they never got" (Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery, 179-181'22).
3. Birmingham collection [1930], p. 31.
4. The three studies of children are in the Birmingham collection (184-186'22); one was included in *Pre-Raphaelite Sculpture* (Matthiesen Gallery 1991-92, no. 4, illus.).
5. This studio, known as the Iron House or the "Tin-pot," was first occupied in 1875. "Though two large canvases stood there for many years, with certain designs upon them by the hand of Sir Edward Burne-Jones, he never painted there; and the canvases were at last claimed" (Mary S. Watts, *George Frederic Watts* [London, 1912], vol. 1, p. 290).

51.

The Feast of Peleus

1872-81

Oil on canvas, 14 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 43 in. (37.5 x 109.2 cm)

Signed: EBJ 1872-81

PROVENANCE: William Graham; William Kenrick; presented in his memory by W. Byng Kenrick, 1956

EXHIBITED: Grosvenor Gallery, London, 1882, no. 157; New Gallery 1892-93, no. 29; Arts Council 1975-76, no. 120

Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery (1956P8)

This jewel-like panel, one of Burne-Jones's most meticulously finished works, must have been largely complete by 1873, according to T. M. Rooke's testimony (see cat. no. 50), but was brought to exhibition readiness only in 1881, to be shown at the Grosvenor Gallery the following year. A larger version in oil (Victoria and Albert Museum, London) was begun in 1881 but never completed, the Birmingham panel probably being substituted as an exhibition piece when Burne-Jones realized he would be unable to complete a big picture.¹

It was one of the last paintings bought by the artist's most loyal patron, William Graham, whose daughter Frances (later Lady Horner) remembered Burne-Jones bringing bunches of roses from his London garden to cheer her father during his final illness in the summer of 1885. It then became the one major work acquired by William Kenrick (1831-1919), Burne-Jones's only significant patron in his native city of Birmingham.

The scene is the wedding feast of Thetis and Peleus, King of Thessaly, in the company of the gods and goddesses, with their centaur attendants. At the left end of the table are Mars and Vulcan, and on the right Bacchus, with Proserpine and Ceres behind him. Beside Apollo, with his harp, Love prepares the marriage couch while the three Fates spin the web of mortal destiny. On the extreme right stands the uninvited figure of Discord, with bat wings and snake-entwined hair, who has just entered, preceded by Mercury. The latter, in winged cap and sandals, kneels as he presents the golden apple and a scroll inscribed "Detur Pulcherrimae" (For the Fairest). This is intended by Discord to cause dissent between Venus, Minerva, and Juno, who stand expectantly behind the table beside Jove.

The same compositional structure of a frieze of seated figures anxiously looking toward an interrupting entrant was used by Burne-Jones for *The Summons*, the first tapestry of the Holy Grail series (cat. no. 145).

1. The larger oil is reproduced in Harrison and Waters 1973, fig. 170.

52.

The Wheel of Fortune

1875-83

Oil on canvas, 78 $\frac{3}{8}$ x 39 $\frac{3}{8}$ in. (199 x 100 cm)

Signed: E.B.J. MDCCCLXXXIII

PROVENANCE: Arthur James Balfour (later 1st Earl Balfour); 2d Earl Balfour; Vicomte Charles de Noailles; purchased 1980

EXHIBITED: Grosvenor Gallery, London, 1883, no. 67; Tate Gallery 1984, no. 155

Musée d'Orsay, Paris (R.F.1980-3)





Said by his son to have been Burne-Jones's particular favorite among his finished oil paintings, *The Wheel of Fortune* has always been considered one of his most powerful and successful compositions. Even the traditionally hostile *Art Journal* critic, reviewing the Grosvenor Gallery exhibition of 1883, found it "the most noteworthy among the imaginative pictures of the year."¹ By allowing the wheel to fill the picture plane from top to bottom, an illusion of immense scale is created, balancing the huge and implacable goddess against the helpless mortal figures who represent a slave, a king, and a poet. John Ruskin, in his last commentary on Burne-Jones's work in "Mythic Schools of Painting," one of the Art of England lectures delivered in May 1883, praised the conception of "gradual and irresistible motion of rise and fall,—the *tide* of Fortune, as distinguished from instant change or catastrophe, . . . of the connection of the fates of men with each other, the yielding and occupation of high place, the alternately appointed and inevitable humiliation."² When Burne-Jones himself was in a desolate mood, he wrote to his young confidante Helen Gaskell, "My Fortune's Wheel is a true image, and we take our turn at it, and are broken upon it."³

The picture was conceived and begun in 1875, and may have been seen at an early stage during a visit that year by the aesthetically minded Conservative politician Arthur Balfour (1848–1930), who became its first owner. There are five other versions in various media, including a smaller oil of 1885 (National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne), more golden in tone than the steely blues of

the Paris canvas.⁴ The *Times*'s critic, Tom Taylor, was won over by the picture's "wonderful technical skills . . . the beauty of the greys, yellows and flesh tints . . . [and] the admirable drawing of the figures, which shows that the artist has quite got rid of the faults of draughtsmanship which were noticeable in his work only a few years ago."⁵ Numerous drawings survive (see cat. no. 53) for many details of figure and drapery, demonstrating how thoroughly Burne-Jones would rehearse every element of a design.

It has frequently been observed that the powerful nudes echo the work of Michelangelo, particularly the *Captives* in the Accademia, Florence, which Burne-Jones recorded in a sketchbook from his Italian journey of 1871, and *The Dying Slave* in the Louvre, of which he owned a small plaster copy (along with others of *Day* and *Evening* from San Lorenzo, Florence). On the 1871 trip he had made a special study of the Sistine Chapel in the Vatican: "He bought the best opera glasses he could find, folded his railway rug thickly, and, lying down on his back, read the ceiling from beginning to end, peering into every corner and revelling in its execution."⁶ Like some of his best stained-glass designs of the 1870s (see cat. no. 69), the figure of Fortune is equally imbued with the spirit of Michelangelo's statuesque Sibyls. Such an homage was recognized by contemporary critics, including F. G. Stephens, who wrote in the *Athenaeum* that Fortune was like "a gigantic statue of grey and golden coloured marbles . . . her beauty is sculpturesque, and her face has the sadness of Michael Angelo's 'Night.'"⁷

1. *Art Journal*, June 1883, p. 203.

2. Ruskin, *Works*, vol. 33 (1908), p. 293.

3. Letter of March 1893 to Helen Gaskell, quoted in Fitzgerald 1975, p. 245.

4. See Christian 1984b.

5. *Times* (London), May 4, 1883, p. 4.

6. *Memorials*, vol. 2, p. 26.

7. *Athenaeum*, April 28, 1883, p. 547.

53.

Study for "The Wheel of Fortune"

1872

Pencil, 9⁷/₈ x 7 in. (25.2 x 17.7 cm)

Signed: EBJ 1872

PROVENANCE: Presented by the artist, 1893

EXHIBITED: "De Burne-Jones à Bonnard," Musée du Louvre, Paris, 1977, no. 27

Musée du Louvre, Paris, Département des Arts Graphiques,

Musée d'Orsay Collection (R.F. 1950)

PARIS ONLY

This exquisite study demonstrates Burne-Jones's constant concern to fix an idea or a particular pose. In the first two treatments of the subject—a gouache in blue grisaille (Carlisle Art Gallery) and a watercolor from a set of the four

Story of Troy panels, signed and dated 1871 (Watts Gallery, Compton)¹—Fortune is depicted blindfold. The artist here considers the equal potency of revealing the figure's full profile, echoing the idealized beauty of her male victims, while rendering the sense of implacability by showing her with closed eyes. That this is indeed intended as a study for *The Wheel of Fortune* is shown by the absence of any suggestion of the model's hair, which Burne-Jones already had in mind to conceal beneath classical headgear.²

If the date of 1872 on this sheet is to be believed (and many drawings were dated retrospectively for exhibition purposes in the 1890s), Burne-Jones would have returned to this study when he began work on the large oil painting in 1875.³ Subsequent studies for the male figures can be linked to known further progress on the painting in 1879, 1881, and 1883.⁴ The drawing is one of a group of three presented by the artist to the Musée du Luxembourg in recognition of his election as a corresponding member of the Académie des Beaux-Arts in 1892.

1. Christian 1984b, figs. 3, 4.

2. According to Mrs. Comyns Carr, wife of one of the directors of the Grosvenor Gallery, Fortune's cap was finally painted from "a quaint little bonnet" of her own design (*Mrs. J. Comyns Carr's Reminiscences*, edited by Eve Adam [London, 1926], p. 62).

3. Two further studies for the head of Fortune, in monochrome oil, are clearly of a later date and taken from a different model (Christian 1984b, figs. 10, 11).

4. A fine pencil study of the muscular torso of the king, in the British Museum (Arts Council 1975–76, no. 126), bears a retrospective inscription with the date 1879 and an incorrect identification as a study for the slave. An equivalent study for the slave, without inscription, appeared at Sotheby's Belgravia, March 24, 1981, lot 51.





54

54.

Venus Discordia

Begun 1872–73; unfinished

Oil on canvas, 50½ x 82⅝ in. (128.2 x 209.8 cm)

PROVENANCE: Second studio sale, Christie's, June 5, 1919, lot 183; William Hesketh Lever, 1st Viscount Leverhulme; bought from his sale, 1926

EXHIBITED: Arts Council 1975–76, no. 123

National Museum & Gallery, Cardiff, Wales (NMW181)

Two subjects, Venus Concordia and Venus Discordia, appear in the Story of Troy scheme as predella panels flanking *The Feast of Peleus* (cat. no. 51). The two designs in pencil begun in 1871 fall into the relatively rare category of carefully finished presentation drawings, comparable in detail and execution with the Saint George series made six years earlier (cat. nos. 32, 35, 36).

According to his own record of works, Burne-Jones began both these large paintings in 1872, concentrating on *Venus Discordia* in the following year. With such a mass of work soon to follow, however, including the Briar Rose and Perseus series, little serious further work can have been undertaken. Only in the 1890s was he able to return to some of the larger canvases begun so enthusiastically in this extraordinary period of fertile invention.

That there is no significant change in composition to *Venus Discordia* from the drawing of 1871 may suggest that most of

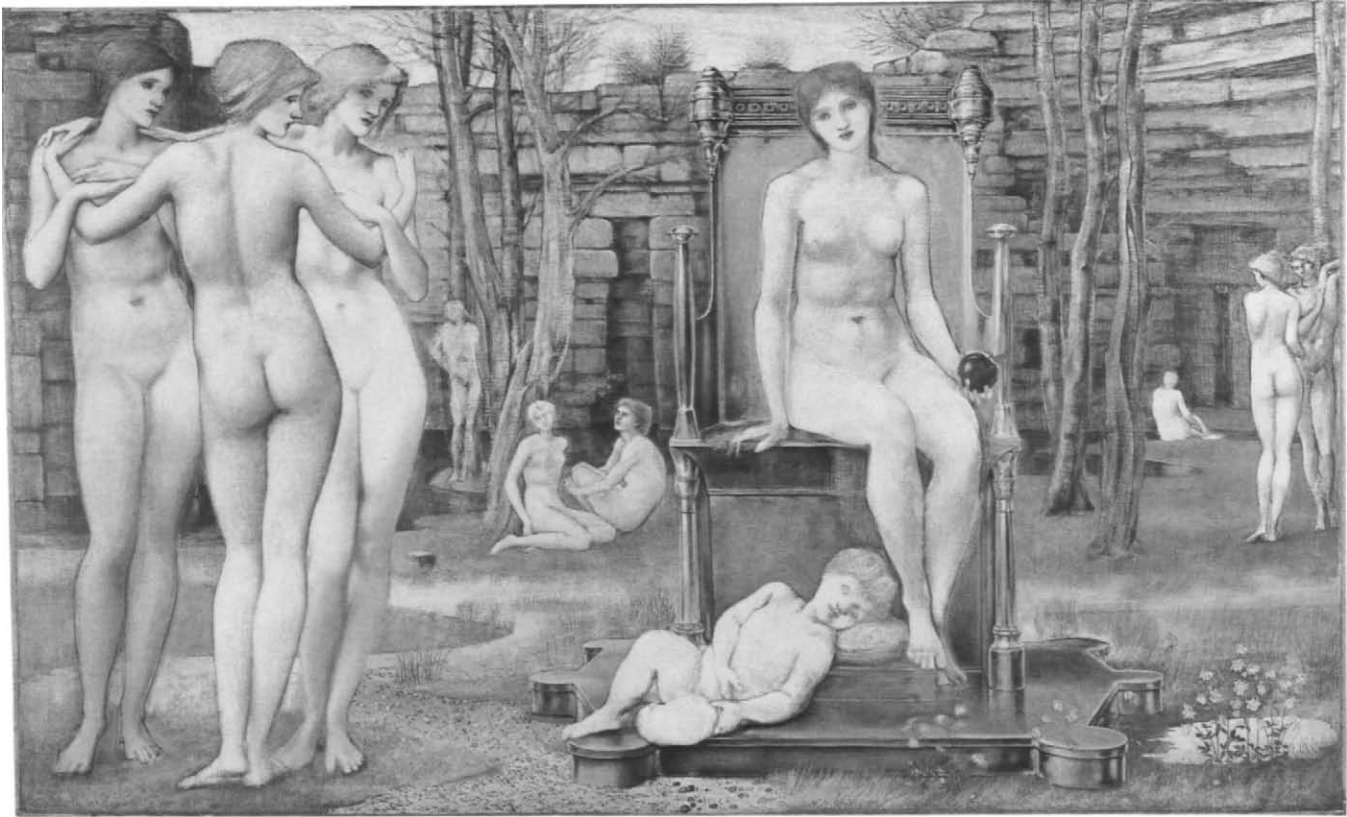
what we see is work of 1873; it would have been out of character for Burne-Jones to resist making improvements to concepts he might have considered immature. The drawing represents the violent consequences of baser human passions, represented by the four Vices (Anger, Envy, Suspicion, and Strife). The struggling male nudes carry clear echoes of the kind of early Italian Renaissance art in which Burne-Jones was totally absorbed at this date. The background frieze of figures is reminiscent of the celebrated engraving *Battle of the Nudes* (ca. 1465), by Antonio Pollaiuolo.

There is a separate pencil drawing of the figure of Venus, almost identical in pose but with her head cupped in her left hand.¹

1. Christie's, November 13, 1992, lot 102

The Briar Rose

The story of Sleeping Beauty appears in the fairy tales of Charles Perrault and the brothers Grimm, and was used by Tennyson in his poem "The Day-Dream," published in 1842. Burne-Jones had first treated the subject in a tile panel of 1864 (cat. no. 25), part of the scheme of decoration for the house of



Edward Burne-Jones, *Venus Concordia*, begun 1872 (unfinished). Oil on canvas, 50 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 83 in. (128.5 x 211 cm). City Museum and Art Gallery, Plymouth



Edward Burne-Jones, *Venus Concordia*, 1871. Pencil, 11 $\frac{7}{8}$ x 19 in. (30.3 x 48.4 cm). Whitworth Art Gallery, University of Manchester



Edward Burne-Jones, *Venus Discordia*, 1871. Pencil, 11 $\frac{7}{8}$ x 19 in. (30.3 x 48.4 cm). Whitworth Art Gallery, University of Manchester

the painter Myles Birket Foster. He returned to the theme in 1869–71, beginning a set of oil paintings for William Graham, now known as the “small” Briar Rose series. Three canvases, all now at the Museo de Arte de Ponce, were completed in 1873: *The Briar Wood* (cat. no. 55), showing the prince discovering the sleeping knights; *The Council Chamber*, with the king and his courtiers asleep; and *The Rose Bower* (cat. no. 58), in which Sleeping Beauty awaits the prince’s reviving kiss. An additional subject of female attendants asleep at a loom, *The Garden Court*, is not known to have been undertaken, although a half-size watercolor sketch may be of this date.¹

As in the case of *Pygmalion and the Image* (cat. nos. 87a–d), the artist almost immediately began a larger set of four oils, but work was laid aside in favor of other commitments, and he recorded finishing “the 1st of the Briar Rose” only in 1884.² Agnew’s had agreed to pay him £15,000 for the paintings, and it seems that they were already with the firm by 1885, awaiting completion, when he decided on a radical reworking of the other three subjects, apparently beginning new canvases. Work is recorded on “the Sleeping Princess” in 1886, and in 1887 he “re-drew all the figures of the sleeping girls in the 3rd picture of the sleeping palace,” presumably a



Edward Burne-Jones, *The Garden Court* and *The Rose Bower*, from the Briar Rose series (1874–90), as installed in the saloon at Buscot Park, Oxfordshire

reference to *The Garden Court*, although a group of six large bold studies in bodycolor dated 1889 (cat. no. 57) shows that he was still concerned with these. After further work throughout 1889, he “finished them—all four” in April 1890, scrupulously dating them 1870–90 to indicate their long gestation. They were exhibited in the summer at Agnew’s, “to ever-increasing crowds of delighted visitors,”³ and subsequently at Toynbee Hall in the East End of London, “where many thousand people came to see them without entrance fee.”⁴ Bought by the financier Alexander Henderson, later 1st Lord Faringdon, the oils were installed in the saloon at Buscot Park in Oxfordshire (only two miles from Kelmscott Manor), where they remain; Burne-Jones painted ten additional strips of canvas (without figures) to fit into the paneling between them.

What must be the three canvases abandoned in 1885 were taken up again and completed between 1892 and 1894: *The Council Chamber* (cat. no. 56), *The Garden Court* (1894; Bristol Museums and Art Gallery), and *The Rose Bower* (1894; Municipal Gallery of Modern Art, Dublin).⁵

1. Christie’s, June 11, 1993, lot 93.

2. According to Burne-Jones’s retrospective “*List of my designs drawings and pictures* [etc.],” now in the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge (transcript at Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery).

3. Bell 1892, p. 63.

4. *Memorials*, vol. 2, p. 205.

5. Although on the same scale as the larger sets of canvases, a version of *The Briar Wood*, sold at Christie’s, November 27, 1987, lot 143 (42 x 72¼ in.), may be of even earlier date than the Graham oils, as indicated by the inscription on the stretcher: “The Knights in ‘The Briar Rose’ early design painted in 1869.”

55.

The Briar Rose: The Briar Wood

1871–73

Oil on canvas, 23½ x 50¼ in. (60 x 127.5 cm)

PROVENANCE: William Graham; by descent to Mrs. Raymond Asquith; Major J. C. Bulteel

EXHIBITED: New Gallery 1898–99, no. 47; Isetan Museum of Art 1987a, no. 13–1

Museo de Arte de Ponce, Puerto Rico. The Luis A. Ferré Foundation, Inc. (59.0112)

The composition of *The Briar Wood* is similar to that of the central panel in the *Sleeping Beauty* tiles of 1864 (cat. no. 25), although Burne-Jones has lessened the effect of symmetry by moving two of the sleeping knights to the center and adding two huddled figures on the right. The prince holds his sword in exactly the same way as does Childe Roland (cat. no. 14), and



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is dressed in very similar armor. A complete revision of the figure, now more akin to Saint George (cat. no. 85), is one of the main alterations in the 1884 oil, in which the pose of the secondary knights has again been refined and the background of briars and shields completely changed.

William Morris provided verses to be lettered beneath the framework surrounding each of the four paintings installed in the saloon at Buscot Park, with this one for *The Briar Wood*:

The fateful slumber floats and flows
About the tangle of the rose;
But lo! The fated hand and heart
To rend the slumbrous curse apart!

The verses were later published in *Poems by the Way* (1891), together with "Another for The Briar Rose," which addresses the pictures' metaphorical reading as an image of "the tangle of world's wrong and right." While there is no evidence that the artist wished to invest the scenes with such moral

symbolism, contemporary commentators did see in them a religious, even political, significance. Having mused on "the whole [scene's having] transported me to a thousand miles from London, to a thousand years from the age of Mr. Gladstone," the critic Robert de la Sizeranne saw in *The Briar Wood* the moral that "the most righteous cause, the truest ideas, the most necessary reforms, cannot rise triumphant, however bravely we may fight for them, before the time fixed by the mysterious decree of the Higher Powers. . . . The strongest and the wisest fail. They exhaust themselves with battling against the ignorance and meanness of their generation, which hem in and hamper them like the branches of the briar rose; and at last they fall asleep in the thorny thicket, like the five knights, who were as valiant as their successor, but who came before their time."¹

1. Robert de la Sizeranne, "In Memoriam, Sir Edward Burne-Jones: A Tribute from France," *Magazine of Art*, 1898, p. 516, quoted in Powell 1986, p. 17.



Edward Burne-Jones, *The Briar Wood*, 1874–84. Oil on canvas, 49 x 91 in. (125 x 231 cm). The Faringdon Collection, Buscot Park (The National Trust)



56.

The Briar Rose: The Council Chamber

1872–92

Oil on canvas, 49 x 104 in. (124.4 x 264.1 cm)

Signed: EB-J 1872–92

PROVENANCE: Agnew's; bought by Samuel Bancroft, 1892; gift of the estate of Samuel and Mary R. Bancroft, 1935

EXHIBITED: *Examples of the English Pre-Raphaelite School of Painters*, Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Philadelphia, 1892, no. 91;

Delaware Art Museum 1976, no. 4–29

Delaware Art Museum, Wilmington. Samuel and Mary R. Bancroft Memorial (35–3)

The figures in this canvas are almost identical to those in the first version (now at the Museo de Arte de Ponce, Puerto Rico), though the young courtiers on the right now have closed rather than open mouths. Burne-Jones could not have been satisfied with the composition, however, and introduced some elaborations to the oil that was finally exhibited at Agnew's and is now at Buscot Park. A seated figure was

introduced at the left, as a vertical feature to balance the new throne for the king. The courtier at the king's feet is shown full-face (and, like his master, he has fallen asleep while reading), while the curtain is given stronger folds and raised to reveal the faces of sleeping knights in the courtyard beyond. These are Morris's accompanying lines:

The threat of war, the hope of peace,
The Kingdom's peril and increase
Sleep on and bide the latter day,
When fate shall take her chains away.

In the reworking of this and all the later oils, Burne-Jones increased the density of the rose foliage and blossom. Writing about 1884 to Eleanor, Lady Leighton, he had asked whether "if in your land there grow stems of wild-rose such as I have to paint in my four pictures of the Sleeping Palace—and if deep in some tangle there is a hoary, aged monarch of the tangle, thick as a wrist and with long, horrible spikes on it." Just such a piece of briar was found and duly dispatched, Burne-Jones reporting that he would "for many days reconsider all my ways, amending the old work everywhere. . . . For I had made all the



Edward Burne-Jones, *The Council Chamber*, 1885–90. Oil on canvas, 49 x 91 in. (125 x 231 cm). The Faringdon Collection, Buscot Park (The National Trust)

thorns too big—too hooked and sharp—not the stems too thick, but the thorns were all amiss; and now my honour will be saved, and the Sleeping Beauty's honour, which is of more account.”¹

I. *Memorials*, vol. I, p. 145.

57.

The Briar Rose: Study for “The Garden Court”

1889

Bodycolor, 36 x 23 7/8 in. (91.2 x 60.6 cm)

Signed and dated: EBJ 1889 BRIAR ROSE

PROVENANCE: Bequeathed by Miss K. E. Lewis, 1961

EXHIBITED: New Gallery, London, 1890, no. 339; Fine Art Society 1896, no. 173; Arts Council 1975–76, no. 180; Isetan Museum of Art 1987a, no. 28–2

Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery (1961P50–2)

The maiden pleasance of the land
Knoweth no stir of voice and hand,
No cup the sleeping waters fill,
The restless shuttle lieth still.

It can only have been Burne-Jones's desire to complete the remaining Briar Rose subjects for Agnew's on entirely new canvases that caused him to abandon the Bristol version of *The Garden Court* in 1887, since there are only slight variations in the figures. These are telling, however, as in the transformation of the pose of the second girl from the left from that of a naturalistic sleep to one of a deep, trancelike state.

The subtle but important changes were worked out in an exceptional series of six studies in solid bodycolor, in which the artist all but eliminated detail (leaving, for instance, the hand on an extraordinarily modern-looking wedge) in order to invoke a timeless and soporific mood. Remarkably, he signed and inscribed them all, and sent them for exhibition at the New Gallery in 1890, to complement the showing of the finished oils at Agnew's. Although Burne-Jones may have castigated Whistler, during evidence he gave in support of Ruskin in the libel trial of 1878 (see p. 195), for his want of “finish,” and the Impressionists for their general “muzz,” he must have been aware of the force and sheer beauty of such perfect examples of painterliness as these.

58.

The Briar Rose: The Rose Bower

1871

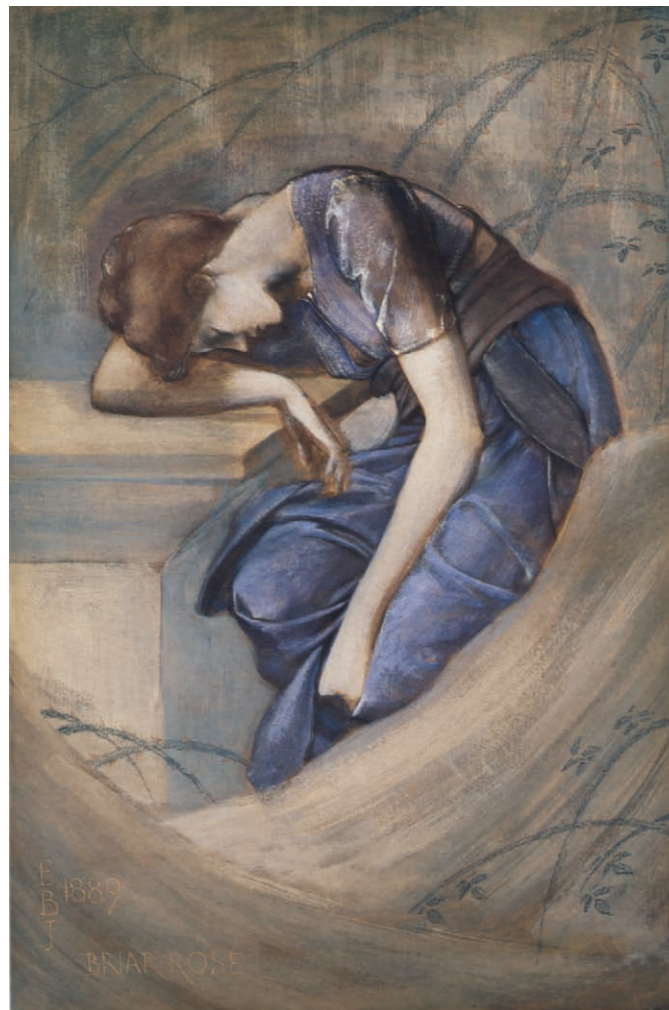
Oil on canvas, 23 1/2 x 45 1/4 in. (60 x 115 cm)

Signed: EBJ MDCCCLXXI

PROVENANCE: William Graham; by descent to Mrs. Raymond Asquith; Major J. C. Bulteel

EXHIBITED: New Gallery 1898–99, no. 57; Isetan Museum of Art, 1987a, no. 13–3

Museo de Arte de Ponce, Puerto Rico. The Luis A. Ferré Foundation, Inc. (59.0114)

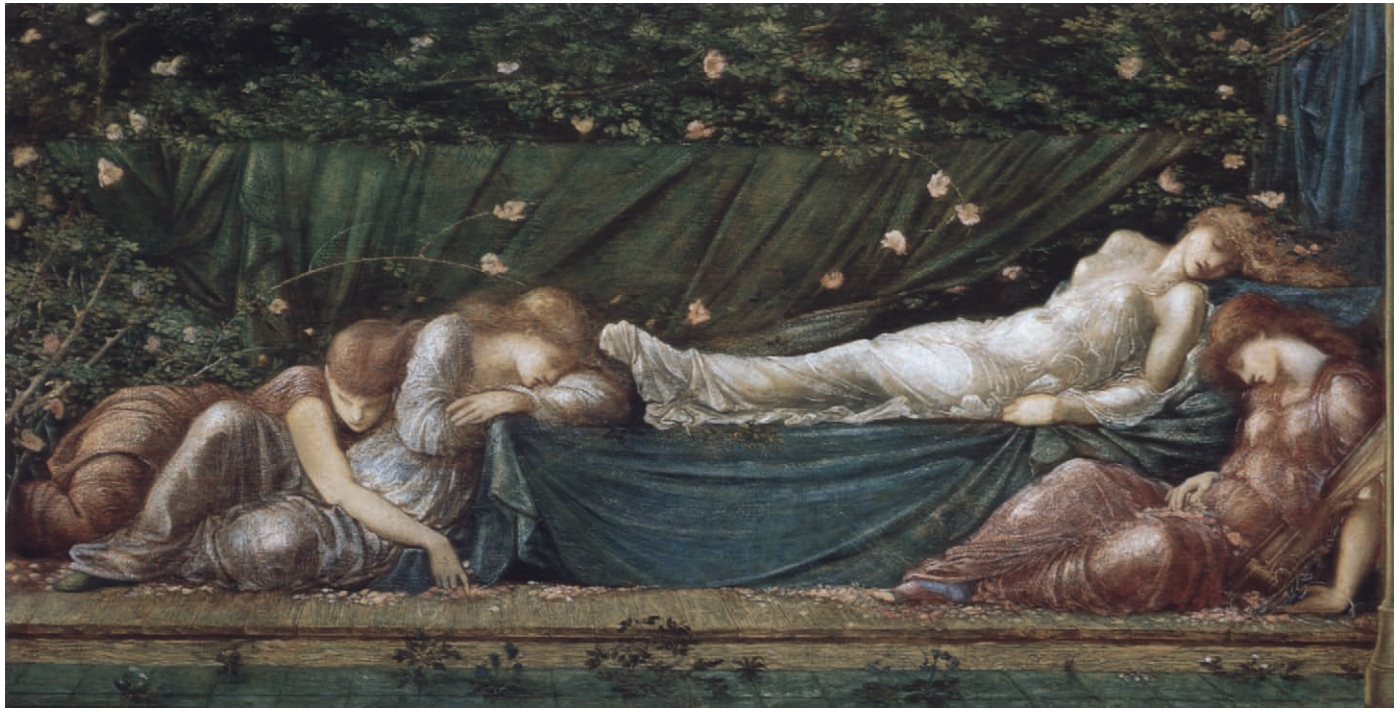


57

Here lies the hoarded love, the key
To all the treasure that shall be;
Come fated hand the gift to take,
And smite this sleeping world awake.

Morris's verse offers a suggestion of the erotic nature of the image of the sleeping princess, which is much more evident in this first version than in the larger oil of 1886–90, where her diaphanous drapery is replaced by a far less revealing Byzantine costume. The romantic mood of the original conception, with its simple but brilliantly effective harmony of red and green, is somewhat lost amid the clutter of the later picture, Burne-Jones confessing to a greater interest in the “archaeology,” “where I took the pains to make the armour of the Knight later than the palace and ornaments and caskets and things and dresses of the ladies and courtiers.”¹

Burne-Jones painted a small, independent watercolor on vellum of the Sleeping Beauty (1871; Manchester City Art Galleries) and another gouache of larger size, repeating the figures of the princess and her immediate attendant from the second oil.² Dated 1886–88, this was given as a wedding present to his daughter, Margaret, and son-in-law, J. W. Mackail, who married on September 4, 1888. The indisputable likeness



58



Edward Burne-Jones, *The Rose Bower*, 1886–90. Oil on canvas, 49 x 91 in. (125 x 231 cm). The Faringdon Collection, Buscot Park (The National Trust)

of the princess to Margaret (in both the gouache and the oil) has been seen as a reflection of her father's sadness at losing her as a daily companion, feelings which perhaps underlie the concept of *The Rose Bower*.³

1. Lago 1981, p. 173 (entry for March 9, 1898).

2. Sold at Christie's, November 25, 1988, lot 120 (38¼ x 59 in.).

3. "Only in an enchanted world like the Briar Rose palace could the princess, Margaret, remain a child and the king, her father, escape aging and death" (Powell 1986, p. 20); of the many psychological interpretations made of Burne-Jones's works, this is one of the more plausible.

59.

William Morris and Edward Burne-Jones

The *Rubáiyát* of Omar Khayyám

1872

Illuminated manuscript of twenty pages, 11¼ x 8¼ in. (28.6 x 22.2 cm); bound in red leather, gold tooled

Text and decoration by William Morris; six pages with illustrations by

Edward Burne-Jones, each 2¼ x 4¼ in. (5.7 x 10.8 cm), in watercolor and bodycolor, within borders of gold

PROVENANCE: Presented to Frances Graham

EXHIBITED: New Gallery 1892–93, no. 163; Burlington Fine Arts Club 1899, p. 42, no. 2; Arts Council 1975–76, no. 271

Private collection

Calligraphy was one of William Morris's many passions, and between 1870 and 1875 he began no fewer than twenty-one manuscript books, many of which he also illuminated or planned to have decorated by Burne-Jones and Charles Fairfax Murray (see cat. no. 66). One of the first was *A Book of Verse* (National Art Library, Victoria and Albert Museum, London), completed in August 1870 as a gift for Georgiana Burne-Jones.¹ Georgie was also the recipient in 1872 of the first of four versions of the recent translation of the *Rubáiyát* by the twelfth-century poet Omar Khayyám (British Library, London), illustrated with Morris's own tiny pictorial scenes among a profusion of naturalistic decoration.² The present manuscript, which has no title page, was given by Morris to Burne-Jones, who made a gift of it to Frances Graham, the daughter of his patron William Graham.

The *Rubáiyát*, published anonymously in 1859, at first attracted little attention but found enthusiastic admirers in Rossetti and Swinburne, who gave Burne-Jones a copy of the first edition during his convalescence in the winter of 1861.³ Burne-Jones recommended it in 1863 to Ruskin, who was so taken with the work as to leave a letter to be forwarded "To the Translator of Omar Khayyam," declaring, "I never did—till this day—read anything so glorious, to my mind, as this

RUBÁIYÁT OF OMAR KHAYYAM



Sometimes I think that never blows so red
The rose as where some buried Caesar bled
That every hyacinth the garden wears
Dropped in its lap from some once lovely head
XIX
And this delightful herb, whose tender green
Fledges the river's lip on which we lean
Ah, lean upon it lightly! for who knows
From what once lovely lip it springs unseen!
XX
Ah, my Beloved, fill the cup that clears
To-day of past regrets, and future fears!
Tomorrow? Why, tomorrow I may be
Myself with Yesterday's seven thousand years

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poem." Again through Burne-Jones, Charles Eliot Norton showed great interest, and it was he who finally forwarded Ruskin's note to Edward FitzGerald (1809–1883) in 1873, having discovered from Thomas Carlyle the identity of the translator.⁴ The poem remained one of Burne-Jones's favorites, and although he had little sympathy for the Islamic world, in letters he expressed delight in its "splendid blasphemies."⁵ Subsequently he must have met FitzGerald, as a crayon portrait of the translator was shown at the New Gallery's Burne-Jones memorial exhibition of 1898–99.⁶

All but one of Burne-Jones's illustrations depict a male and

a female figure in romantic settings, three of them moonlit. The third (shown here) reproduces the composition of *Love among the Ruins* (private collection), a watercolor of 1870 which was one of only two works exhibited in the pre-Grosvenor Gallery years, at the Dudley Gallery in 1873 (along with *The Hesperides* [1870–73; Kunsthalle, Hamburg]). This was later shown at the Exposition Universelle in Paris in 1878, but suffered severe damage when carelessly washed with egg white by a photographer's assistant in 1893. A large replica in oil (Wightwick Manor, The National Trust) was undertaken immediately, and exhibited at the New Gallery in 1894.⁷ The

image takes its title from Robert Browning's poem of the same name (from *Men and Women*, 1855), but is equally suitable to the dolorous mood of the *Rubáiyát*.

1. Victoria and Albert Museum 1996, no. N.5.
2. *Ibid.*, no. N.8.
3. *Memorials*, vol. 1, pp. 234–35; according to Georgie Burne-Jones, the same copy was used by Morris in transcribing the poem.
4. See John Lewis Bradley and Ian Ousby, eds., *The Correspondence of John Ruskin and Charles Eliot Norton* (Cambridge, 1987), p. 147 n. 1.
5. *Memorials*, vol. 2, p. 135; Burne-Jones thought FitzGerald's to have been "a grey life, but very lovable . . . but I think Omar Khayyám is an immortal work, and he shall live by that" (Horner 1933, p. 115).
6. New Gallery 1898–99, no. 199 (lent by Mrs. W. J. FitzGerald).
7. See Hartnoll 1988, p. 48.

60.

Study for "The Masque of Cupid"

1872

Pencil and charcoal, 22⁷/₈ x 35³/₄ in. (58 x 90.8 cm)

PROVENANCE: The artist's second studio sale, Christie's, June 5, 1919, lot 8, bought by Sir W. Goscombe John for 15 gns.; presented by him to the National Museum of Wales in 1930

EXHIBITED: Arts Council 1975–76, no. 205

National Museum & Gallery, Cardiff, Wales (NMWA5602)

NEW YORK AND BIRMINGHAM

61.

Study for "The Masque of Cupid"

1872

Pencil on paper laid down on linen, 25⁵/₈ x 32⁷/₈ in. (65 x 83.3 cm)

Inscribed upper right: LUXORII

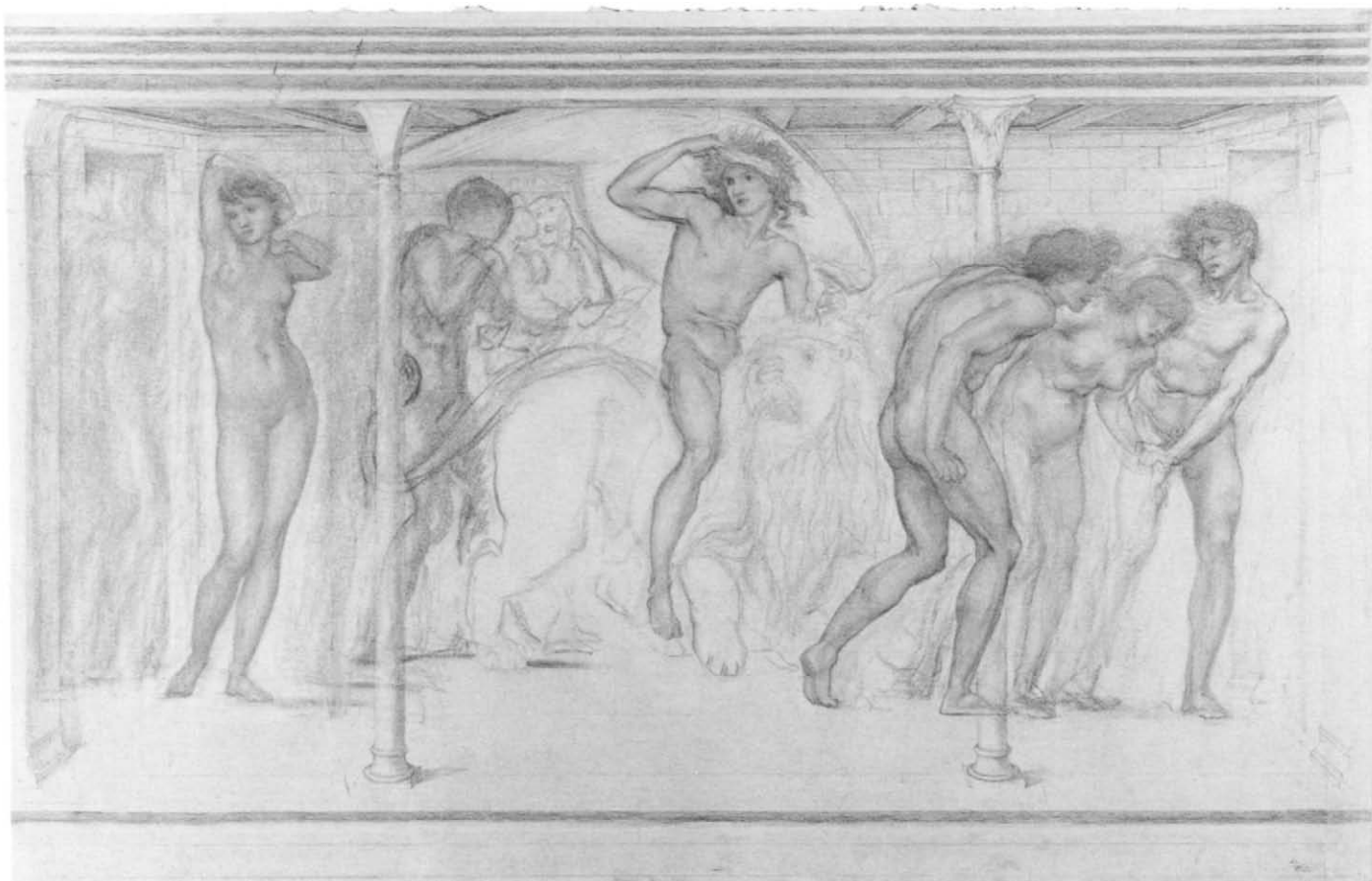
PROVENANCE: The artist's second studio sale, Christie's, June 5, 1919, lot 8, bought by Sir W. Goscombe John for 15 gns.; presented by him to the National Museum of Wales in 1930

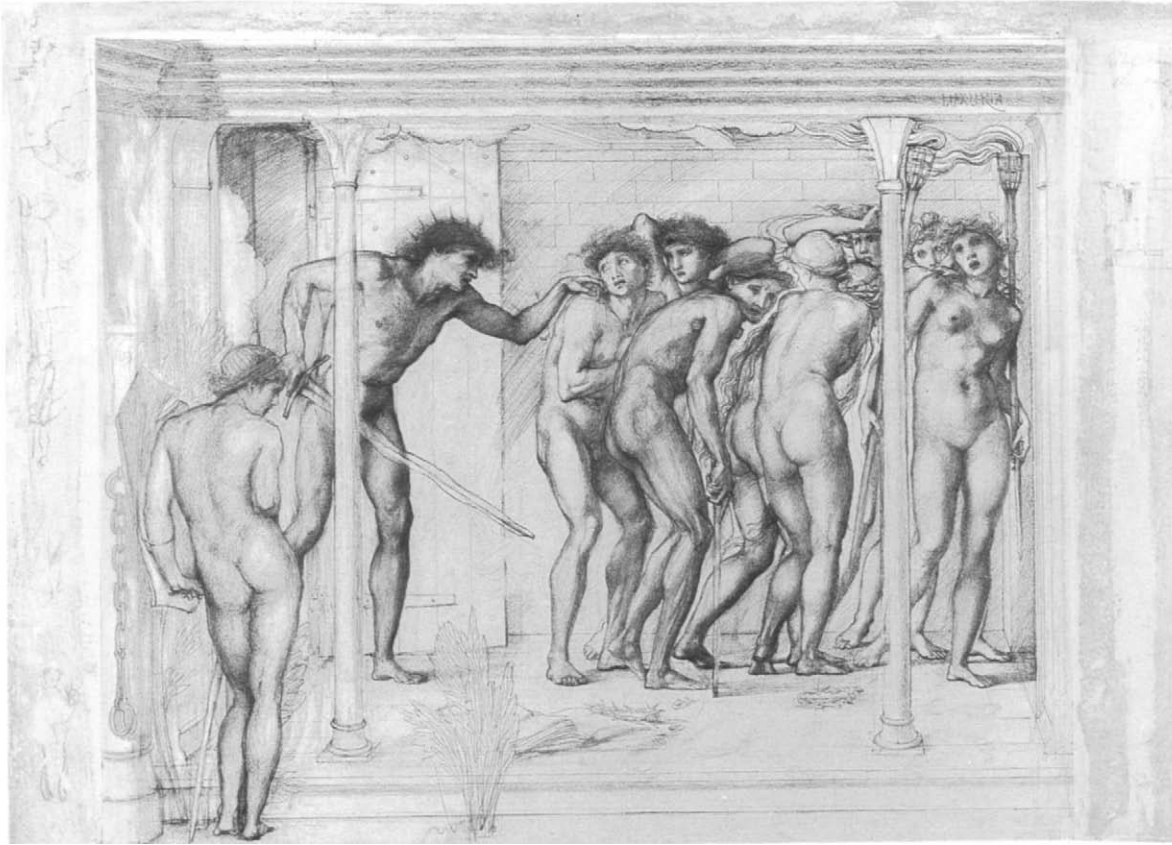
EXHIBITED: Arts Council 1975–76, no. 205

National Museum & Gallery, Cardiff, Wales (NMWA5603)

NEW YORK AND BIRMINGHAM

The subject of these two drawings is taken from Edmund Spenser's *Faerie Queene* (1590), book 3, canto 12. In one drawing (cat. no. 61) Britomart, the "fair" or "bold Britonesse" who represents maidenly purity, stands to the left, watching the masque of Cupid in the house of Busyrane. The figures to her right seem to be what Spenser describes as a "rude confused rout" of unhappy personifications—Strife, Anger, Care, Infirmary, Loss of Time, and others, harried by Death himself brandishing a sword. This, however, is not entirely clear, and it is curious that the drawing bears the inscription "Luxorii," since no such abstract value is represented in the masque. The figures in the other drawing (cat. no. 60) are easier to identify: Cupid is seen riding a lion and preceded by Despight and





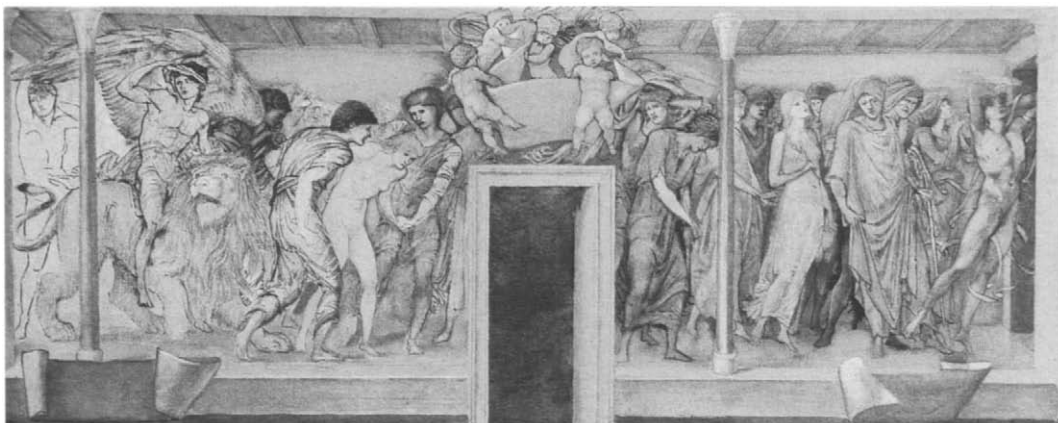
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Cruelty, “two grysie villeins,” who lead and savagely torture Dame Amoret.

These fine drawings come from a group of three in the National Museum and Gallery of Wales, all showing the figures nude. They date from 1872 when Burne-Jones, in the full flush of inspiration following his third visit to Italy the previous year, wrote in his work record that there were “4 subjects which above all others I desire to paint, and count my chief designs for some years to come,” and then went on to identify one of them as “the Vision of Britomart; in 3 pictures . . . life size.” It is not clear why he was so anxious to paint the subject on this scale, or indeed to illustrate Spenser at all, since the poet was not an author, so far as we know, to whom he was particularly attached. Perhaps he was influenced by Ruskin’s tendency to use “The Masque of Cupid” and other allegorical

passages in Spenser to illuminate moral precepts, or perhaps by G. F. Watts’s long-standing interest in the poet, expressed most notably in the painting *Britomart and Her Nurse* (Birmingham Art Gallery), which was exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1878. It is also possible that the concept owed something to the processional paintings favored by two other artists in Burne-Jones’s circle, Frederic Leighton and Walter Crane. Whatever the case, the work hung fire. Maybe its inspiration was never as deep-seated as he had imagined, or possibly, like the Troy triptych (cat. no. 50), it was simply conceived in too-ambitious terms.

Burne-Jones did return to the scheme in later life. According to one source, it was “subsequently drawn out again, about two-thirds life-size, on canvas for tapestry, but abandoned,” and then “taken up again, for the third time,” in 1898.¹ Another



Edward Burne-Jones, *The Masque of Cupid*, ca. 1898. Watercolor, 21⁵/₈ x 52¹/₂ in. (55 x 133.5 cm). Private collection

authority links the project to “mural decoration,” but confuses the drawings in question.² All we know for certain is that in the last year or two of his life, Burne-Jones recast the composition in at least two watercolor designs, clearly for some sort of room decoration and in his most disembodied late style.³ Georgie Burne-Jones mentions his doing so but suggests that, even if he had lived, he would once again have let the idea drop. “About this time,” she wrote, “he took up again the designs made in 1872 for ‘The Masque of Cupid,’ but on looking freshly at the poem he found it had become quite unreadable to him, and the names in it, as in the Pilgrim’s Progress, actually repellent.”⁴

The present drawings have an interesting provenance, having been bought at Burne-Jones’s second studio sale by the sculptor Sir William Goscombe John (1860–1952). Goscombe John had a certain link with the Pre-Raphaelites, as he had started his career working for one of their associates, the Gothic Revival architect William Burges (1827–1881), while as a Welshman he would have been interested in Burne-Jones, who had Welsh blood on his father’s side. In any case, these strong working drawings are of a type that would have appealed to a practicing artist. [JC]

1. Burlington Fine Arts Club 1899, p. 4, under no. 7.

2. De Lisle 1904, p. 189.

3. Two of these drawings (there may be a third) were exhibited at the Burlington Fine Arts Club, 1899, nos. 7, 45. The former, illustrated here, was sold at Sotheby’s, London, July 10, 1995, lot 93.

4. *Memorials*, vol. 2, p. 306.

62.

Desiderium

1873

Pencil, 8¼ x 5¼ in. (21 x 13.3 cm)

Signed lower right: EBJ/1873/DESIDERIUM/A STUDY FOR THE/MASQUE OF CUPID

PROVENANCE: Presented to the Tate Gallery by Sir Philip Burne-Jones in 1910

EXHIBITED: Probably New Gallery 1892–93, no. 100; Burlington Fine Arts Club 1899, no. 147; Arts Council 1975–76, no. 206

Tate Gallery, London (ND2760)

The drawing is a study for one of the allegorical figures in *The Masque of Cupid* as designed in 1872 (cat. nos. 60, 61). In Spenser’s *Faerie Queene* “amorous Desyre” is described as a male figure, and although the pose here corresponds closely with his action—blowing sparks between his hands “that soone they life conceiv’d, and forth in flames did fly”—the model is clearly a woman. She is, in fact, a little reminiscent of Maria Zambaco (cat. no. 49), but was probably someone of a similar physical type that Burne-Jones employed in the early 1870s, when his affair with the Greek beauty, though past its zenith, was apparently far from finished. While Maria seems to have embodied for Burne-Jones the classicism of the late 1860s, her appearance was not Grecian in the usual sense of the



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term. With her rather pronounced features and luxuriant, waving hair, she was, if anything, Botticellian, and her type continued to haunt her lover’s work when it assumed a more Florentine mode in the early years of the following decade. So far as the present drawing is concerned, it is tempting to go further, and suggest that its erotic character reflects the experience of their liaison.

Be that as it may, the study is a particularly fine example of Burne-Jones’s draftsmanship, exquisite in conception and technique. It is not surprising that he never sold it, or that his son gave it to the Tate Gallery. The second example of his work to enter the British national collection, it was preceded only by *King Cophetua* and *the Beggar Maid* (cat. no. 112) in 1900.

[JC]

63.

Laus Veneris

1873–78

Oil, with gold paint, on canvas, 48 x 72 in. (122 x 183 cm)

Signed and dated on the zither: E. BURNE JONES 1873–5

PROVENANCE: Bought from the artist by William Graham; his sale, Christie’s, April 3, 1886 (second day), lot 162, 2,550 gns., to Agnew’s; Sir William Agnew and by descent to Philip Agnew (1933); Mrs. Philip Agnew’s sale, Sotheby’s, December 4, 1957, lot 100, bought by Agnew’s for Huntington Hartford; his sale, Sotheby’s, March 17, 1971, lot 57, bought by Agnew’s; purchased by the Laing Art Gallery in 1972



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EXHIBITED: Grosvenor Gallery, London, 1878, no. 106; New Gallery 1892–93, no. 57; New Gallery 1898–99, no. 96; Tate Gallery 1933, no. 1; Arts Council 1975–76, no. 135

Laing Art Gallery, Newcastle upon Tyne (Tyne and Wear Museums)
NEW YORK AND BIRMINGHAM

Laus Veneris has always been held in particular affection by the artist's admirers and regarded as one of his greatest achievements. On its first appearance at the Grosvenor Gallery in 1878, F. G. Stephens, the art critic of the *Athenaeum*, described how all visitors were attracted to it; it was, he wrote, "the great work of [our] most lovable and masterly painter," a picture that could be examined "inch by inch with unending pleasure," a "poem in paint so absorbing" that one hardly wanted to look at anything else.¹ When he saw it again in 1892 his enthusiasm was undimmed. "At first sight," he wrote, "it looks like a brilliant medieval illumination resplendent with superb scarlet, white, blue, and rose colour; . . . [while] the poetry which has inspired it belongs to some early *canzo* of Provence. The charms of the faces and the grace of the expressions and the elegance of the figures must be seen to be appreciated. . . . There cannot be a shadow of doubt that 'Laus Veneris' will bear comparison with the best work of Mr Burne-Jones."² Graham Robertson went even further. "I wonder," he wrote to

a friend in 1933, "which you consider to be his best picture. I should vote for 'Laus Veneris,' . . . a lovely, glowing thing—as fresh and brilliant as ever after all the years. How well I remember my first sight of it as a boy."³

The picture was started in 1873, worked on for two months in 1874, taken up again in 1875, and finished (despite the inscription) only in 1878, shortly before it was sent for exhibition to the Grosvenor. Like *Le Chant d'Amour* (cat. no. 84), which was exhibited with it, it was one of the most important pictures that Burne-Jones painted for William Graham, and reflects his patron's strong preference for romantic subjects in the Venetian mode. In fact, Graham seems to have thought of the two paintings as pendants, linked in subject (love and music) and comparable in scale, shape, and richness of tone, although the fact that *Laus Veneris* was pitched in a much higher key than the somber *Chant d'Amour* also provided a certain contrast. Between them he planned to hang a picture called *Blind Love*, which was never completed. It was to be a large version of an early watercolor (private collection) showing "a figure of Love, quite blind [and] crowned with flowers, groping his way through the street of a city in the early morning, seeking the house he shall enter." "This design," Lady Burne-Jones recalled, "Edward always meant to carry out on a larger scale in oils; indeed he began it, and the wreath of roses is painted on Love's head."⁴

Both *Laus Veneris* and *Le Chant d'Amour* were also large versions of early watercolors. In each case these belonged to Graham, who would often commission another version of a composition he particularly liked, even if he owned the original. The watercolor version of *Laus Veneris* (private collection) had been painted in 1861 and must have been one of Graham's earliest purchases from Burne-Jones, whose work he first encountered at the Old Water-Colour Society in 1864. All the main elements of the composition are already in place, although the drawing is still very immature and there are a few differences in detail; for example, the cat curled up under the couch fails to reappear in the oil. Rossetti's mistress, Fanny Cornforth, modeled for the figure of Venus.⁵

The conception is based on the German legend of Tannhäuser, the wandering knight who comes to the Venusberg and abandons himself to a life of sensual pleasure. Overcome by remorse he goes to Rome to seek absolution from the Pope, who tells him that remission is no more possible than that his pastoral staff should blossom. In despair Tannhäuser returns to the arms of Venus, but in three days' time the Pope's staff miraculously puts forth flowers. Emissaries are sent far and wide to find the sinner, but he is never heard of again.

The subject of a traditional German ballad, the story was recast by many nineteenth-century writers and, like Wilhelm Meinhold's *Sidonia von Bork* (see cat. no. 12), gained currency in England through the vogue for German Romantic literature. The best-known version was that incorporated in Ludwig Tieck's tale *The Trusty Eckart*, which was translated by Thomas Carlyle in his *German Romance* (1827). William Morris, who treated the story as "The Hill of Venus" in his cycle of narrative poems *The Earthly Paradise* (1868–70), is said to have derived it from Tieck, and no doubt Burne-Jones too was familiar with this version, probably from his Oxford days, when he had read so much Carlyle and been fascinated by another German author included in his hero's collection, the Baron de la Motte Fouqué. There is also evidence to suggest that he was aware of two other English translations that appeared in 1861, the year he painted the early watercolor. One was "Tannhäuser; or, The Battle of the Bards," a long Tennysonian poem by Neville Temple and Edward Trevor, pseudonyms for the poet Julian Fane (1827–1870) and the novelist Edward Bulwer-Lytton (1803–1873). The other was a translation from the old German ballad by Lady Duff Gordon (who also, incidentally, translated Meinhold), published in the magazine *Once a Week* in August that year with an illustration by John Everett Millais.

The relationship between Burne-Jones's composition and Morris's account of the subject in *The Earthly Paradise* is not particularly striking. Perhaps the most that can be said is that Morris kept Burne-Jones's mind focused on the story during the period that separates the early watercolor from the later oil. In 1866 Burne-Jones made a set of twenty illustrations to "The Hill of Venus" for the lavishly illustrated edition of *The Earthly Paradise* that the friends were planning at the time.

Much more significant is the connection between Burne-Jones's composition and Swinburne's poem "Laus Veneris," begun June 14, 1862, and published four years later in *Poems and Ballads*. Like *Sidonia von Bork*, the watercolor version of *Laus Veneris* dates from the period when Burne-Jones and Swinburne were on particularly intimate terms, and their work, even if there is a few months' difference in date, expresses the same or closely related ideas. In the case of *Sidonia*, the parallel is with Swinburne's poetry and prose on the Borgias and other sadomasochistic themes, while the Tannhäuser legend was interpreted almost simultaneously by both artist and poet. It is no accident that *Poems and Ballads* is dedicated to Burne-Jones.

All the main imagery of the painting—the languid figure of Venus, her musician attendants, the scene with Cupid on the tapestry, the knights in a wintry landscape—reappears in the poem. It is sometimes said that the painting (specifically the oil, since the watercolor is hardly known) has none of the smoldering eroticism so typical of Swinburne's version,⁶ but in fact on his own terms and in a different medium, Burne-Jones does evoke the sense of overheated, claustrophobic space that Swinburne captures in such lines as "Inside the Horsel here the air is hot," or "Her little chambers drip with flower-like red"; while the dominant notes of orange and red that occur throughout the painting have their counterparts in Swinburne's repeated use of words like "blood," "flame," and "fire" to maintain a mood of steamy sensuality. Even the cat that appears in the 1861 watercolor finds a parallel in the panther, tiger, and serpent which figure as symbols of passion and languor in Swinburne's poem.

Painter and poet, moreover, were open to the same influences. One was Edward FitzGerald's re-creation of the world of Eastern exoticism in his free translation of the *Rubāiyāt* of Omar Khayyām. Published anonymously in 1859, the book was "discovered" by Rossetti and Swinburne near the beginning of 1861 and received with tremendous enthusiasm by their circle. It is known that Swinburne began his "Laus Veneris" as an act of homage to FitzGerald's poem, and that it was he who gave a copy to Burne-Jones, one that was soon "worn with frequent reading and transcribing."⁷

More important, however, were the combined forces of the poet Charles Baudelaire and the composer Richard Wagner. Swinburne was a passionate admirer of Baudelaire's poems *Les Fleurs du mal* (1857), and in a rapturous review in the *Spectator* in September 1862 he dwelled on precisely those values—"the weariness of pain and the bitterness of pleasure . . . a heavy, heated temperature, with dangerous hothouse scents," and so forth, which he exploits so brilliantly in "Laus Veneris" and other contemporary poems.⁸ It is unlikely that he did not pass on his excitement to Burne-Jones. Both of them, furthermore, were probably aware that in March 1861 Wagner's opera *Tannhäuser* was booed off the stage in Paris after only three performances, evoking a spirited defense of the composer by Baudelaire, published in the *Revue Européenne* the following month. In 1862 Swinburne sent Baudelaire his *Spectator* article,

and a year later Baudelaire sent Swinburne a copy of his pamphlet on Wagner. If Burne-Jones's watercolor of 1861 does reflect the fortunes of Wagner's opera in Paris, then it finds a fascinating counterpart in Fantin-Latour's painting *Scène de Tannhäuser* (Los Angeles County Museum of Art), which was inspired by the experience of seeing the Paris production itself. Exhibited at the Salon of 1864, the picture was seen the previous year by Swinburne when James Abbott McNeill Whistler, their mutual friend, took him to Fantin-Latour's studio. It eventually entered the collection of Alexander Ionides, who was also a patron of Burne-Jones (see cat. no. 103).

When Swinburne's *Poems and Ballads* was published in 1866 it caused an outcry, being condemned as decadent, "unclean," the product of a "putrescent imagination." The book was withdrawn by its first publisher, and there were threats of a prosecution for obscenity. One of the fiercest critics was the Scottish journalist and poetaster Robert Buchanan, and he renewed his onslaught in 1871. Following the publication of Rossetti's *Poems* the previous year, he published an article in the *Contemporary Review* entitled "The Fleshly School of Poetry," in which he attempted to destroy both poets by playing on Victorian fears of anything sensuous or "unhealthy," especially if it was French in origin. Indeed, in a sense he did destroy Rossetti, whose health and mental stability were permanently undermined by Buchanan's savage attack.

Some of this animosity and suspicion can still be felt in reviews of Burne-Jones's *Laus Veneris* seven years later, when it must have been generally known that the picture had a literary counterpart in Swinburne's poetry and that the artist had been the dedicatee of *Poems and Ballads*. Frederick Wedmore, writing in the magazine *Temple Bar*, felt bound "to protest against and to bewail the prominence of the unhealthy type with which his work has familiarised us. 'Laus Veneris' is an uncomfortable picture, so wan and death-like, so stricken with disease of the soul, so eaten up and gnawed away with disappointment and desire, is the Queen of Love at the Grosvenor. . . . The type is to many an offensive, to most a disagreeable one, and the Venus is of that type the most disagreeable, the most offensive example. The very body is unpleasant and uncomely, and the soul behind it . . . ghastly."⁹

There are echoes of this attitude even in Henry James's review of the Grosvenor exhibition in the *Nation*, although he puts it more wittily and in effect makes it seem ridiculous. The figure of Venus, he writes, "has the face and aspect of a person who has had what the French call an 'intimate' acquaintance with life; her companions, on the other hand, though pale, sickly, and wan, in the manner of all Mr Burne-Jones's young people, have a more innocent and vacant expression, and seem to have derived their languor chiefly from contact and sympathy."¹⁰

Laus Veneris is the outstanding example in Burne-Jones's

work of his tendency to reduce the sense of recession in his pictures by arranging his compositions in parallel planes and emphasizing surface pattern. The whole picture has a tapestry-like consistency of style, achieved partly by chromatic means, including the introduction of "shot" colors, and partly by a remarkable use of rich textures. The most striking example is the dress of Venus, which has been stamped all over with a circular punch in the wet underpainting prior to being glazed in color. The problem of integrating the distant knights is solved by framing them in the window so that they appear like a picture on the wall, while the wall itself is covered with "real" tapestries—tapestries, so to speak, within a tapestry, linked to the foreground figures not only in terms of color and texture but thematically, since they represent subjects in which Venus appears. The composition on the right, showing her drawn in a chariot while Cupid shoots arrows at her votaries, was conceived in 1861 as a design for tiles.¹¹ It was recast in the 1870s as an independent easel painting,¹² and in 1898 was adapted yet again for a tapestry made by the Morris firm (cat. nos. 100, 101).

Two further decorative details of the picture may be mentioned: the blue tiles around the window opening, reminiscent of those made by Burne-Jones's friend the potter William De Morgan, and the seats, so strikingly modern in design and apparently fine examples of the Pre-Raphaelites' disregard for comfort. They remind one of Angela Thirkell's comment on the chairs that her grandfather had made when he was designing *The Summons*, the first of the Holy Grail tapestries, about 1891 (cat. no. 145). They were, she wrote, "suited to no known human body. . . . Some had round backs and some were square and there was little to choose between them for sheer discomfort. . . . If that is how Arthur's court was furnished it is quite enough to explain the eagerness of the knights to leave their seats and follow the quest of the Holy Grail, and one can only conclude that the Siege Perilous was even more uncomfortable and ill-adapted to the human frame than the seats of the other knights."¹³

[JC]

1. *Athenaeum*, May 18, 1878, p. 642.

2. *Ibid.*, January 28, 1893, p. 128.

3. Robertson, *Letters*, pp. 284, 295.

4. *Memorials*, vol. 1, p. 257. The painting survives in a fragmentary state (private collection).

5. The study for this figure, formerly attributed to Rossetti, was offered at Christie's on June 9, 1995, lot 270, illus.

6. See, for example, Graham Reynolds's review of "The Pre-Raphaelites," the major exhibition held at the Tate Gallery, London, in 1984, in *Apollo* 119 (May 1984), p. 380.

7. *Memorials*, vol. 1, p. 235.

8. *Spectator*, September 6, 1862, p. 999.

9. Frederick Wedmore, "Some Tendencies in Recent Painting," *Temple Bar* 53 (July 1878), p. 339.

10. James 1956, p. 162.

11. See Harrison and Waters 1973, p. 52, fig. 59.

12. *Ibid.*, colorpl. 26.

13. Thirkell 1931, pp. 80–81.



64.

The Beguiling of Merlin

1873–74

Oil on canvas, 73¼ x 43¾ in. (186 x 111 cm)

Signed: E. BURNE JONES MDCCCLXXIV

PROVENANCE: Bought from the artist by Frederick Leyland; Lilian, Duchess of Marlborough; bought by William Hesketh Lever, 1st Viscount Leverhulme, 1918

EXHIBITED: Grosvenor Gallery, London, 1877, no. 59; Exposition Universelle, Paris, 1878, no. 121; New Gallery 1892–93, no. 65; New Gallery 1898–99, no. 68

Board of Trustees of the National Museums and Galleries on Merseyside, Liverpool (Lady Lever Art Gallery, Port Sunlight; LL3121)

65.

Study for the head of Nimuë in “The Beguiling of Merlin”

ca. 1873

Watercolor and bodycolor on paper, mounted on wood, 30 x 20 in. (76.2 x 50.8 cm)

PROVENANCE: First studio sale, Christie’s, July 16, 1898, lot 44; Samuel Bancroft

EXHIBITED: Arts Council 1975–76, no. 130

Delaware Art Museum, Wilmington. Samuel and Mary R. Bancroft Memorial (35–40)

Although *The Beguiling of Merlin* was one of the major works with which Burne-Jones made his triumphant public reappearance at the opening of the Grosvenor Gallery in 1877, it had been begun many years before, and was conceived possibly as early as 1870, to fulfill a commission from Frederick Leyland. He started work in 1872 and was well under way during the following year, when he discovered that his paints were not adhering properly to the canvas; a letter to his patron expresses his frustration at falling “victim of some trumpery material,” and includes the promise to “begin it all over again if you think it worth while.”¹ Of course Leyland did, and work resumed early in 1873. Although the canvas is dated 1874, there is evidence of some additional work before its eventual exhibition.

There are many preparatory drawings, including an early compositional design in which the figures are drawn from the nude.² A weighty drapery study of 1872, one of his finest, is among several for the picture now at the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, that testify to Burne-Jones’s usual preparation from studio models. Such studies amplify the failure of Ruskin to appreciate this kind of work—something that caused Burne-Jones genuine distress—as expressed in Ruskin’s letter: “Nothing puzzles me more than the delight that painters have in drawing mere folds of drapery and their carelessness about

the folds of water and clouds, or hills, or branches. Why should the tuckings in and out of muslin be eternally interesting?” Georgiana Burne-Jones commented sadly that this showed Ruskin “without that love of the human form which to an artist makes each fold of drapery that clothes it alive.”³

The watercolor of the head of Nimuë must date from 1872 or 1873 and is one of the artist’s best portraits of Maria Zambaco. A letter of 1893 to his friend Helen Gaskell found him musing that “the head of Nimuë in the picture called *The Enchanting of Merlin* was painted from the same poor traitor and was very like—all the action is like—the name of her was Mary. Now isn’t that very funny as she was born at the foot of Olympus and looked and was *primaeva*l and that’s the head and the way of standing and turning . . . and I was being turned into a hawthorn bush in the forest of Broceliande—every year when the hawthorn buds it is the soul of Merlin trying to live again in the world and speak—for he left so much unsaid.”⁴ This identification with the beleaguered magician, only half in jest, goes some way to explain the development of the image from its previous treatment in the watercolor of 1861 (cat. no. 15). For the Grosvenor Gallery catalogue Burne-Jones provided a passage of text deriving from the late medieval French *Romance of Merlin*, in which Nimuë is far more the *femme fatale*, luring the magician to his doom as they walk together in the forest. Her hair is now entwined with snakes, like the Gorgon Medusa, and Merlin is depicted as curiously acquiescent, as if aware of his inability to prevent her from capturing his heart and diminishing his powers, an image perhaps deliberately rather than subconsciously echoing Burne-Jones’s own feelings toward Maria.

In his capacity as an art critic, William Michael Rossetti (Dante Gabriel’s brother) succinctly summed up a general reaction in finding impressive “the grand figure of Nimue dark and lovely, with a loveliness that looks ominous and subtle without being exactly sinister, and the exquisite painting of the lavish white hawthorn blossom.”⁵ The integration of figures and background is particularly masterly, with a sinuous linear rhythm leading the eye around the protagonists and lighting on the contrasts between Nimuë’s lively face, hands, and feet and Merlin’s defeated limpness. F. G. Stephens thought “Nimue’s face in its snaky intensity of malice is marvellous, not so the weak and womanish visage of Merlin.”⁶ Burne-Jones had indeed encountered difficulty in finding the right head, and had pursued Rossetti’s suggestion of the American painter and journalist William James Stillman (1828–1901), who agreed to sit in spite of the artist’s trepidation: “I don’t think I *can* ask him, knowing him so little and the pose being torture.”⁷

Henry James noticed perceptively that, especially on works of this scale, Burne-Jones’s figures “seem flat and destitute of sides and backs,” but equally he had to admire *The Beguiling of Merlin* as “a brilliant piece of *rendering* . . . [that] could not have been produced without a vast deal of ‘looking’ on the artist’s part.”⁸ The painting went on to the 1878 Paris Exposition Universelle, as the first of Burne-Jones’s works to be seen by an

appreciative audience abroad, initially finding greater favor with the critics than with the general public. Charles Blanc was one of several writers who enthused over the painting: "To my mind the most stunning picture which has come from London is that by Burne-Jones: *Merlin and Vivien*. There is in it a quintessence of the ideal, a hidden poetry which strikes me to the heart."⁹

1. *Memorials*, vol. 2, p. 39.
2. Fogg Art Museum 1946, no. 21.
3. *Memorials*, vol. 2, p. 18.
4. Quoted in Fitzgerald 1975, p. 150.
5. *Academy* 11 (1877), p. 467.
6. *Athenaeum*, May 5, 1877, p. 584.
7. *Memorials*, vol. 2, pp. 39–40.
8. *Galaxy*, August 1877; reprinted in James 1956, p. 145.
9. Charles Blanc, *Les beaux-arts à l'Exposition Universelle de 1878* (Paris, 1878), p. 335 ("à mon sens la plus étonnante peinture qui nous soit venue de Londres est celle de Burne-Jones: *Merlin et Viviane*. Il y a là une quintessence d'idéal, une poésie sublimée qui m'appréhende au cœur"). This review and others are quoted in the thorough account of the picture given in Lady Lever Art Gallery collection 1994, pp. 7–11.

66.

Illuminated Manuscript: The Aeneid

1874–75

William Morris, Edward Burne-Jones, and Charles Fairfax Murray;
completed by Louise Powell and Graily Hewitt

Ink, watercolor, and gold on vellum, 13¼ x 8¾ in. (35 x 22.3 cm)

PROVENANCE: Charles Fairfax Murray; Estelle Doheny; Saint John's Seminary, Camarillo, California

EXHIBITED: Victoria and Albert Museum 1996, no. N.14

Collection Lord Lloyd-Webber

NEW YORK ONLY



"Every Sunday morning," Burne-Jones wrote to Charles Eliot Norton in 1874, "you may think of Morris and me together—he reads a book to me and I make drawings for a big Virgil he is writing—it is to be wonderful and put an end to printing." From 1870 Morris had been making his own illuminated manuscripts (see cat. no. 59), and in 1873 he conceived the idea of a folio of Virgil's *Aeneid*, with twelve large designs and a host of decorated initials. This would occupy Burne-Jones during their habitual Sunday meetings. It was an impossibly ambitious project, and Georgiana Burne-Jones recalled that "there were many things to prevent the completion of the scheme, amongst others the temptation Morris felt whilst following the Latin to turn the great poem into English verse—which he did."² Six of the twelve books of the poem were transcribed onto vellum, however, Charles Fairfax Murray being entrusted with the task of copying Burne-Jones's major designs.³ Murray later bought the book, whose text and decoration were completed by the calligraphers Graily Hewitt (1864–1953) and Louise Powell (1882–1956).

Twenty-nine pencil drawings at the Fitzwilliam Museum, most of which are dated 1873 and 1874, include studies for initial letters as well as for the twelve main half-page illustrations. Although on a small scale, they possess a linear strength and figurative solidity comparable with larger designs of a similar date for stained glass: *The Burning of the Ships*, for example, has the same kind of dynamic power as the cartoon for *Rage* (cat. no. 70). This subject shows the women of Troy incited by Iris, the messenger of the goddess Juno, to burn their menfolk's ships and put an end to their wanderings seven years after the fall of the city.

Virgil's epic poem describes the various journeys of the Trojan prince Aeneas, son of Anchises and the goddess Venus. In the seventh book he reaches Italy and the court of Latinus, king of Latium. There he is offered the hand in marriage of the king's daughter Lavinia, whom the oracles had prophesied must become the wife of a foreign prince, even though she is secretly betrothed to Turnus, king of the Rutuli. In an omen of foreboding, Lavinia is immersed in the fires of the altar of Vulcan, which she is tending, an event that allowed Burne-Jones great play with billowing swirls of flame and hair:

Out! How along her length of hair the grasp of fire
there came,
And all the tiring of her head was caught in crackling
flame.
And there her royal tresses blazed, and blazed her
glorious crown
Gem-wrought, and she one cloud of smoke and yellow
fire was grown:
And wrapped therein, the fiery God she scattered
through the house:
And sure it seemed a dreadful thing, a story marvellous.

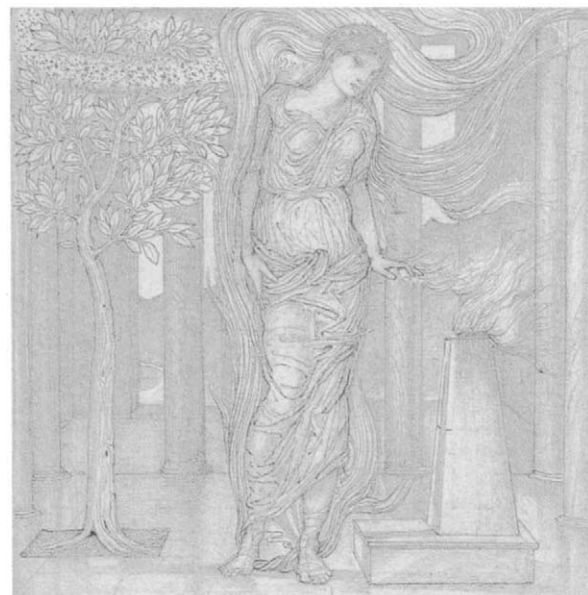
Turnus then claims Lavinia as his bride, causing Aeneas to take up arms against him, in a long struggle which he eventually



66. Venus and Aeneas



Edward Burne-Jones, *The Burning of the Ships*, 1874. Pencil, 6 3/4 x 6 3/4 in. (17.2 x 17.1 cm). Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge



Edward Burne-Jones, *Lavinia in the Palace of Latinus*, 1874. Pencil, 6 3/4 x 6 3/4 in. (17.2 x 17 cm). Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge



66. Venus Giving Arms to Aeneas

wins. Initially, he is provided with armor by Venus, in a scene that parallels the arming of Perseus by Minerva in the Perseus series (cat. no. 88).

1. *Memorials*, vol. 2, p. 56.

2. Ibid. Morris's translation, *The Aeneid of Virgil*, was published in 1875.

3. Morris envisaged doing this himself, but admitted to Murray, in a letter of May 27, 1875: "I have begun one of the Master's [Burne-Jones] pictures for the Virgil: I make but a sorry hand at it at first, but shall go on at it till (at the worst) I am wholly discomforted. Meantime, whether I succeed or not in the end 'twill be a long job: so I am asking you if you would do some of them" (Morris, *Letters*, vol. 1, 1848–1880 [1984], p. 254). For a full account of the manuscript, see Brinton 1934.

67.

Saint Mark

Designed 1874, executed 1883 by Morris & Company

Stained-glass panel, 57½ x 24¾ in. (145 x 62 cm)

PROVENANCE: Bequeathed by J. R. Holliday, 1927

EXHIBITED: Foreign Fair, Boston, 1883; Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna 1986, no. 100

Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery (1927M1016)

68.

Saint Luke

ca. 1890s

Bodycolor and charcoal on canvas, 55½ x 27 in. (141 x 68.6 cm)

PROVENANCE: Second studio sale, Christie's, June 5, 1919; Maas Gallery, London

EXHIBITED: Fitzwilliam Museum 1980, no. 55; Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna 1986, no. 96

Collection Mrs. Sally Oliver

The three painted roofs and eleven stained-glass windows executed in the Chapel of Jesus College, Cambridge, between 1866 and 1878 represent some of the greatest achievements of William Morris's firm. Not only does the scheme include some of Burne-Jones's finest designs, but its progress to completion witnessed a radical change in the operation of the business. Following the appointment of George Warrington Taylor as manager in 1865 (succeeded by George Wardle five years later) and a move from Red Lion Square to larger premises in Queen Square, Bloomsbury, it grew dramatically and began to show a profit in the early 1870s. This precipitated a decision by Morris to disband Morris, Marshall, Faulkner & Co., the old and rather amateur association of friends founded in 1861, and to reshape the firm in 1875 as Morris & Company, with Burne-Jones becoming effectively its sole designer of stained glass.¹

Among no fewer than fifty-five designs by Burne-Jones for these windows are the ten exceptional Angels of the Hierarchy of 1873 in the main wall of the south transept, the adjacent four windows each containing an Evangelist figure flanked by two Sibyls (cat. no. 69).² These weighty and powerful figures are among the most impressive of all Burne-Jones's designs for stained glass, which even he acknowledged, in an account-book entry for September 1873: "St Matthew. Jesus S Trans. No. 1—hastily executed I admit but altogether a bold conception. Bold conception £15."³

The Evangelist figures proved to be very popular with Morris & Company's later clients, and were repeated twenty-eight times as a complete set (seventeen times in Burne-Jones's lifetime), with other additional uses of individual figures. This version of *Saint Mark* (cat. no. 67) is one of five panels now in the Birmingham collection that were included in Morris & Company's display at the Foreign Fair held in Boston in 1883, a rare excursion into advertising their wares abroad, but one that would have capitalized on the success of stained-glass windows only recently installed in Boston, at Trinity Church and in the Church of Our Saviour, Monmouth Street (Brookline).⁴ It differs in many respects from the original Jesus College window, particularly in the use of smaller pieces of glass forming an almost abstract background pattern, which was to become an element of the firm's later style; the figure also fits more neatly within its space, where each Cambridge Evangelist was



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allowed to overlap the clear glass border, a device emphasizing the figure's physical solidity and latent energy. The 1883 window encapsulates the qualities of Morris glass that were promoted in the firm's brochure for the Foreign Fair: "The light and shade must be so managed that the strong outlines shall not appear crude, nor the work within it thin; this implies a certain conventionalism of treatment and makes the details of a figure much more an affair of drawing than of painting; because by drawing,—that is, by filling the outlines with other lines of



68

proportionate strength,—the force of the predominant lines is less unnatural. . . . After these [principles] we ask for beautiful colour. There may be more of it, or less; but it is only rational and becoming that the light we stain should not be changed to dirt or ugliness. Colour, pure and sweet, is the least you should ask for in a painted window."⁵

As in the case of the Sibyls, Burne-Jones returned to the Evangelists for independent paintings, probably at some time in the 1890s: the *Saint Luke* shown here is painted in his

idiosyncratic kind of *détrempe*, chiefly composed of opaque body color, and in the appropriately unearthly tones of gray blue favored for such other striking images as *The Challenge in the Wilderness* (cat. no. 42). A matching canvas, the *Saint Matthew*, is visible on the wall of the artist's studio in a photograph of 1894; the fact that it is framed (albeit simply) suggests that Burne-Jones regarded this later kind of "bold conception" as finished work.⁶

1. See Harvey and Press 1991.

2. Sewter 1974–75, vol. 2, pp. 42–44, vol. 1, pls. 413–40; see also Fitzwilliam Museum 1980, pp. 33–44.

3. Sewter 1974–75, vol. 2, p. 43.

4. Ibid., pp. 17, 223–24. The other panels in the Birmingham collection shown at Boston are *Elijah* (77'20), *Samuel Brought to Eli* (1017'27), *Timothy and Eunice* (1018'27), and the recently acquired *Samuel* (1996.M.64).

5. Quoted in Sewter 1974–75, vol. 1, p. 21.

6. Cartwright 1894, p. 31; this is presumably the picture sold at Sotheby's Belgravia, November 10, 1981, lot 40.

69.

The Tiburtine Sibyl

1875

Pencil, black chalk, and pastel, heightened with gold paint, 44 x 17⁷/₈ in. (111.6 x 45.3 cm)

PROVENANCE: Bequeathed by J. R. Holliday, 1927

EXHIBITED: Grosvenor Gallery, London, winter 1881, no. 346; Arts Council 1975–76, no. 198; Fitzwilliam Museum 1980, no. 67; Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna 1986, no. 101; Art Services International 1995–96, no. 100

Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery (1927P424)

Burne-Jones began designs for the figures of the Sibyls in September 1872 and makes reference to the sea-change in the firm's affairs through this last entry for the series in his account book: "1 April 1875. Day of Dissolution. 2 Sibyls—to wit Erythrea & Tiburtina £30."¹ Although they originate in pagan classical mythology, the ten Sibyls—women chosen to convey divine wisdom to mankind—were adopted by the early Christians, and the so-called Sibylline verses were amended to accommodate Christian philosophy.

The Sibyls were most famously depicted by Michelangelo on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel in the Vatican, which Burne-Jones had studied assiduously on his third visit to Italy in 1871, lying on the floor and looking up through opera glasses (see cat. no. 52). Perhaps having already supplied enough cartoons for the firm's painters to have got the hang of his intentions, in this last design for the *Tiburtine Sibyl* Burne-Jones has taken his draftsmanship to a degree of finish more appropriate for an independent easel picture, and it comes as no surprise to find that he did indeed go on to complete a large watercolor of the subject in 1877.² The companion design for the *Erythrean Sibyl* also survives³ but is less elaborately finished, and it seems



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likely that the colored chalks and gold highlights were added to the present work for its exhibition at the Grosvenor Gallery in 1881, along with other similarly improved stained-glass cartoons (cat. no. 71). Two figures were turned into oil paintings, Burne-Jones for some reason transposing their identification: the Delphic Sibyl in the Jesus College window became the *Cumaeen Sibyl*, one of the artist's eight canvases shown at the first Grosvenor Gallery exhibition in 1877, while the Cumaeen equates with the oil known as *Sibylla Delphica* (fig. 82), exhibited at the Grosvenor Gallery in 1886.⁴

1. Sewter 1974–75, vol. 2, p. 44.

2. Christie's, March 13, 1990, lot 185.

3. Christie's, June 17, 1975, lot 149. The cartoon for the *Cimmerian Sibyl*, further improved with watercolor and body color, is in the Tate Gallery, London (N03427).

4. See Hartnoll 1988, p. 20.

70.

Rage

1875

Pencil on paper, laid down on linen, 26³/₈ x 21³/₈ in. (66.2 x 56.4 cm)

Inscribed: *Rage or Intemperance; and color notes*

PROVENANCE: Bequeathed by J. R. Holliday, 1927

EXHIBITED: Fitzwilliam Museum 1980, no. 69; Musée des Beaux-arts de Nantes 1992, no. 30

Lent by the Syndics of the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge (1231.6)

This striking design for one of four panels in the lower part of a window is in the nave at Jesus College Chapel, Cambridge. They symbolize the passions, contrasted with emblematic figures of contemplative Christian virtues above. In Burne-Jones's account book, undated but after September 20, 1875, is the record: "Injustice—a panel to go under Justice £10. Fear, under Fortitude £10. Folly, under Prudence £10. Rage, under Temperance £10."¹ There are few cartoons as dramatic as these among Burne-Jones's work for Morris, and even on a north wall their glowing colors and sense of dynamic tension are remarkable.

By this date Burne-Jones found it irresistible to complete such designs for stained glass as drawings in their own right, employing, for example, a fineness of line in the ends of both figures' flying hair that could not possibly be matched by the firm's glass painters. This he did not only for his own satisfaction but in homage to the art of the Renaissance, which was his inspiration. The animated contrapposto is particularly reminiscent of such compositions as Raphael's *Massacre of the Innocents* (ca. 1511; British Museum, London), which Burne-Jones would have known through Marcantonio Raimondi's engraving (ca. 1513–15). He was a passionate collector of engravings and photographs, and in a letter of 1871 he wrote enthusiastically about a catalogue sent to him by the American scholar and connoisseur Charles Eliot Norton (1827–1908): "I want them all. Select some for me, will you . . . the more

finished the better. . . . I like the Florentine men more than all others. . . . If Ghirlandajo [*sic*] draws sweet girls running, and their dresses blown about, O please not to let me lose one."² The connection has also been made with the type of clinging drapery on figures from the fifteenth-century inlaid-marble floor of Siena Cathedral, which Burne-Jones saw on his final trip to Italy in the spring of 1873, and carefully recorded in a sketchbook now in the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge.³

1. Sewter 1974–75, vol. 2, p. 44; the equivalent cartoons for *Injustice* and *Fear* are in the Victoria and Albert Museum (ibid., vol. 1, pls. 439, 441; Fitzwilliam Museum 1980, nos. 71, 72).

2. *Memorials*, vol. 2, pp. 20–21.

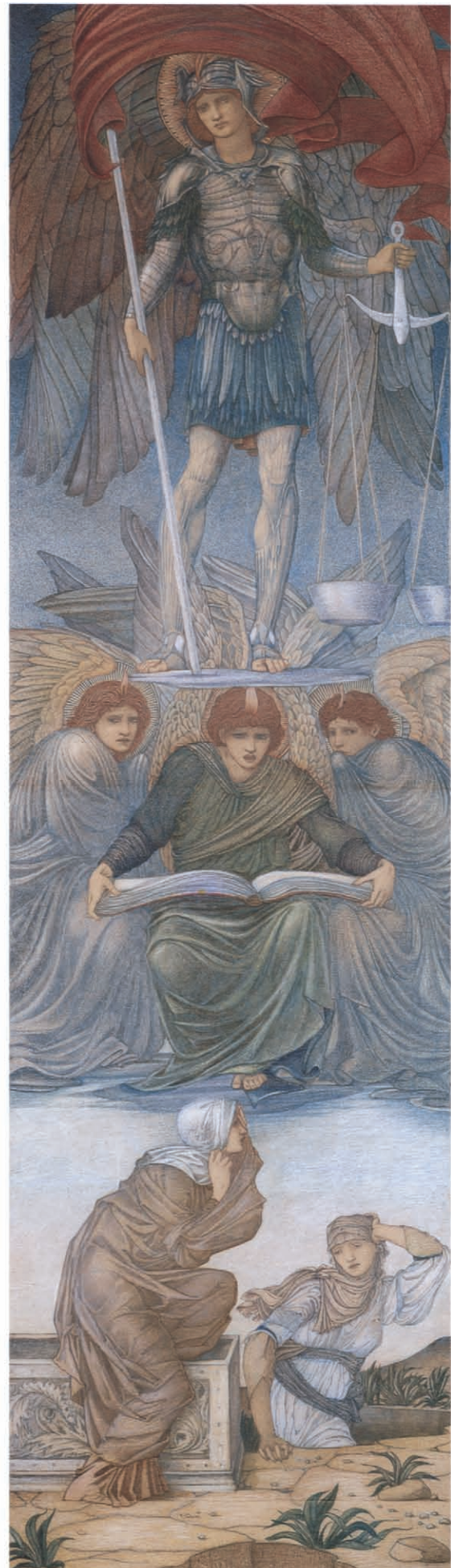
3. Robinson 1975a, p. 348, figs. 2, 4.



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Edward Burne-Jones, *Folly*, 1875. Pencil on paper, laid down on linen, 26³/₈ x 22¹/₄ in. (67.1 x 56.4 cm). Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge





71.

The Last Judgment

1874 (colored 1880)

Wax crayon, center $120\frac{3}{4} \times 33\frac{1}{8}$ in. (305 x 85.5 cm), side panels $120\frac{3}{4} \times 37\frac{1}{8}$ in. (305 x 95 cm)

Signed and dated on left panel: EBJ 1874

PROVENANCE: First studio sale, Christie's, July 16, 1898, lot 59; presented by Rt. Hon. William Kenrick and J. R. Holliday, 1898

EXHIBITED: Grosvenor Gallery, London, winter 1881; Death, Heaven, and the Victorians, Brighton Art Gallery and Museum 1970, no. 49

Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery (1898Pt9)

NEW YORK AND BIRMINGHAM

While there are many depictions of the Nativity, Crucifixion, and Resurrection, only two Last Judgment windows appear among the whole of Morris & Company's production of stained glass: the other is the magnificent west window of Saint Philip's, Birmingham (now Birmingham Cathedral; fig. 20), designed by Burne-Jones for his hometown in 1896. The present spectacular design was made for the east window of Saint Michael and Saint Mary Magdalene at Easthampstead, Berkshire, as a memorial to the 5th Marquis of Downshire, commissioned by his widow in 1874 (fig. 12). The church has four other windows by Morris & Company, including the unique Story of Saint Maurice (1883) and an Adoration of the Magi (1885), both tall, elaborate compositions crowded with figures in a manner recalling the Lyndhurst designs of 1863 (see cat. no. 21).

Burne-Jones charged the exceptional price of £120 for these cartoons, although this also included a circular composition showing Christ in Judgment (*Dies Domini*) for the tracery above, surrounded by six angels.¹ A preliminary pen-and-ink design (now in the collection of the Royal Academy of Arts, London) is dated June 18, 1874, although the cartoons themselves are referred to in his account book between April and June 1875. The inscription giving the date 1874 was probably added retrospectively, when the cartoons were colored (in 1880, according to Bell); they were shown at the winter exhibition of the Grosvenor Gallery in 1881, Burne-Jones having sent nothing to the summer exhibition that year.

In the window the center light is shorter than the other two, and Saint Michael's banner and wings have been extended to fill the space within the original trefoil top; the outer lights have been simply squared off. All traces of the decorative background that appears in the glass—of stars above and stylized clouds below—have been smoothed away. Burne-Jones used mostly delicate colors, with subtle gradations of tone, quite different from those of the stained glass, where Saint Michael is in silver armor with golden wings and the angels are in white with red wings.

1. Sewter 1974–75, vol. 2, pp. 66–67 (the window is reproduced in vol. 1, pl. 510). The cartoon for *Dies Domini* was also worked up independently, and another version in pastel is at the Lady Lever Art Gallery, Port Sunlight.



72

Romaunt of the Rose

To complement his early interest in the poetry of Chaucer (see cat. no. 43), Burne-Jones had sought out other works of medieval literature and was familiar with the famous allegory of courtly love, the *Roman de la Rose*, written in the thirteenth century by Guillaume de Lorris, which served as the basis of Chaucer's *Romaunt of the Rose*.¹ In both versions, the poet dreams of an encounter with the god of Love (one of Burne-Jones's favorite emblematic personages) and discovers a secret garden with a wonderful rose, symbolizing perfect love.

In 1874 Burne-Jones took the opportunity afforded by a decorative commission being undertaken by Morris & Company to illustrate the tale on a frieze of embroidery (cat. no. 72). Preparatory work included full-size drawings (cat. nos. 73, 75) of an exceptional richness, which, like some of his finest stained-glass cartoons (cat. no. 69), seem to have been taken to a degree of finish more out of pleasure than of necessity. As usual, several independent works were to derive from the designs: one large oil painting, *Love Leading the Pilgrim* (cat. no. 74), was started in 1877 but then abandoned, to be taken up and completed some twenty years later. In the interim he finished two other oils, *The Pilgrim at the Gate of Idleness* (cat. no. 78) and *The Heart of the Rose* (see cat. no. 79), which bear the dates 1884 and 1889 respectively, and worked on two matching compositions of *The Pilgrim in the Garden of Idleness*, which exist in two pairs of large and small oils, none of them finished.²

The two most striking subjects, *Love Leading the Pilgrim* and the *Heart of the Rose*, were reproduced in tapestry at Morris & Company's Merton Abbey Works (cat. no. 81).

1. The diary kept by G. P. Boyce records a visit with his sister Joanna and Burne-Jones to the British Museum on April 14, 1860, which included the examination of a fifteenth-century manuscript of the *Roman de la Rose*, "filled with the most exquisite illuminations, as fine as could well be in colour and gradation, tenderness of tone and manipulation, and purity of colour and light" (Surtees 1980, pp. 29–30).

2. One of the large oils is in the Victoria and Albert Museum; the other was sold at Christie's, November 19, 1965, lot 43. The two smaller versions appeared at Christie's, March 22, 1985, lot 86, and June 21, 1985, lot 96.

72.

The Pilgrim in the Garden of Idleness

1874–82

Linen embroidered with colored silk, wool, and gold thread by Margaret Bell and her daughter Florence Johnson; 34 x 247¼ in. (86.3 x 628.7 cm)

PROVENANCE: Sir Isaac and Lady Lowthian Bell; presented by Sir Hugh Bell through the Victoria and Albert Museum, 1953

EXHIBITED: Victoria and Albert Museum 1996, no. M.15a

William Morris Gallery, Walthamstow (London Borough of Waltham Forest; F140c)

NEW YORK AND BIRMINGHAM

Rounton Grange, near Northallerton, Yorkshire, built in 1872–76 for the northern industrialist Isaac Lowthian Bell (1816–1904), was another house designed by Philip Webb for which Morris & Company provided the interior decoration. Although it occasioned Morris's well-known fulmination at "ministering to the swinish luxury of the rich," it was one of the firm's most important and extensive commissions, including wallpaper, painted ceilings, furniture, and a large carpet that was one of the first produced at the Merton Abbey Works in 1881–82.¹

For the dining room Morris and Burne-Jones devised an even more elaborate scheme of decoration than the Palace Green Cupid and Psyche murals (cat. nos. 40a–l). This time there was to be a textile frieze, referred to in both artists' accounts for 1873–74 as "tapestry," but intended to be executed as embroidery. This was carried out, apparently from photographic enlargements of Burne-Jones's drawings,² by Bell's wife, Margaret, and their daughter Florence, taking them eight years to complete. The background of stylized briar roses was designed by Morris.

The three sections covered the north, south, and west walls



of the room. In the center, over a massive stone fireplace, the Pilgrim is shown gazing on sculpted figures representing the miseries of the world—Hate, Felony, Villainy, Covetousness, Avarice, Envy, Sorrow, Age, Time, Hypocrisy, and Poverty³—while on either side is the poet's dream of Love leading the Pilgrim to safety and away from danger, and of introducing him to the Garden of Idleness, where he finds ineffable beauty in the heart of the rose.

1. See Victoria and Albert Museum 1996, pp. 143, 241, fig. 62 (the embroidered frieze in situ).
2. According to De Lisle 1904, p. 114.
3. Burne-Jones portrayed a similar gathering of evils in designs of 1872 illustrating *The Masque of Cupid*, from Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* (see cat. nos. 60–62).

73.

Romaunt of the Rose: Largesse and Richesse

1874

Pencil on joined paper, 35 x 34¼ in. (89 x 87 cm)

Signed, dated, and inscribed: EBJ 1874 Largesse Richesse

PROVENANCE: British Rail Pension Fund; Sotheby's, June 19, 1990, lot 33

Collection Susan L. Burden

NEW YORK ONLY



Edward Burne-Jones, *Love and Beauty*, 1874. Pencil, 35 x 46½ in. (89 x 118 cm). Private collection

In addition to *Love Leading the Pilgrim* (cat. no. 75), three magnificent large drawings survive for pairs of figures: *Love and Beauty*, *Largesse and Richesse*, and *Courtesie and Fraunchise* [Frankness].¹ The figures do not appear in these pairings in the poem or the *Romaunt* (where Beauty accompanies Richesse), Burne-Jones here taking artistic license to make the most effective combinations. He does, however, adhere to certain descriptive details of costume and bearing: Richesse is given a rich headdress to match the jeweled circlet described in the poem, while the artist's fondness for long, clinging drapery is here fully appropriate for the couplet:

For through hire smoke, wrought with silk,
The flesh was seen, as whyt as milk.

1. *Largesse and Richesse* and *Courtesie and Fraunchise* were sold at Sotheby's, June 19, 1990, lots 33, 34; *Love and Beauty* at Sotheby's, March 30, 1994, lot 196.





74

74.
**Romaunt of the Rose:
Love Leading the Pilgrim**

Begun 1877, completed 1896–97

Oil on canvas, 61¼ x 119½ in. (157 x 304 cm)

*Signed: Ptd by E Burne-Jones 1896–7 dedicated to his friend
A C Swinburne*

*PROVENANCE: First studio sale, Christie's, July 16, 1898, lot 89; Mary,
Duchess of Sutherland; presented by the National Art Collections Fund,
1942*

*EXHIBITED: New Gallery, London, 1897, no. 134 (as "The Pilgrim
of Love"); New Gallery 1898–99, no. 130*

Tate Gallery, London (N05381)

BIRMINGHAM ONLY

75.
**Romaunt of the Rose:
Love Leading the Pilgrim**

1876–77

Pencil, 35½ x 71 in. (91.2 x 180.5 cm)

Inscribed: To FG

PROVENANCE: Given by the artist to Frances Graham

EXHIBITED: New Gallery 1892–93, no. 74; Arts Council 1975–76, no. 187

Private collection

76.
Plant study for "Love Leading the Pilgrim"

1877–97

Pencil, 12¼ x 8½ in. (31.2 x 21.6 cm)

*PROVENANCE: Second studio sale, Christie's, June 5, 1919; bought by
Charles Ricketts and Charles Shannon; bequeathed by Shannon, 1937*

EXHIBITED: Musée des Beaux-Arts de Nantes 1992, no. 107

Lent by the Syndics of the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge (2006–1)

77.
**Studies of birds for "Love Leading the
Pilgrim"**

1877–97

Colored chalks, 12 x 8 in. (30.6 x 20.4 cm)

PROVENANCE: Bequeathed by J. R. Holliday, 1927

Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery (1927P457)

BIRMINGHAM ONLY

On the same scale as the drawings for the *Garden of Idleness*, this study for *Love Leading the Pilgrim* (cat. no. 75) must be Burne-Jones's original design, although the landscape background—not required for the embroidery—may have been elaborated to give the work a sense of completeness. De Lisle dates it to 1877, and describes it as:



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one of the finest, in quality of line and composition as well as in charm of poetic feeling, of all Burne-Jones's drawings. Love is represented as a spirit, a guardian angel crowned with roses, round whose head all the birds of the air make sweet music—

He semede as he were an aungel
That down were comen fro hevene clere,

And so intent is the Pilgrim on following him, that he does not even see the smiling valley with its winding river, nor the road which leads to the fair city; but, with his hand in that of Love, he climbs the rocks, and struggles through the thorny places, happy with that vision in front of him, anxious only to follow.¹

The artist presented the drawing to the daughter of his



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77

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patron William Graham. Until her marriage to John Horner in 1883, Frances provided a platonic focus for many of his later romantic yearnings, and reciprocated with an appreciation of his art and benevolent humor.² The gift is recorded on the drawing by a cartouche with her initials, symbolically pierced by one of Cupid's arrows.

Burne-Jones began the large oil painting in 1877, probably then deciding to make several substantial changes in setting and detail. Alterations were made to both figures, especially in the positioning of the heads, and the rather austere rocky foreground, affording much scope for precise pencil work, was given over to a softer grassy space, with foliage (necessitating a rare study from nature) added to the thorny brambles; small, brightly colored birds also appear among the stems, painted from a group of delightful studies (probably late in date).³ Work on the canvas was resumed only in 1895, and it became his last major painting to be completed.

T. M. Rooke's studio diary records Burne-Jones agonizing over the color and tonal effects. On October 29, 1895, the artist had decided not to "put much colour into this—make the landscape melting grey, L'Amant rich black and Love a silvery thing—the figures would jump too much with full colour."⁴ By May 9, 1896, he was painting a "deep tone over the previously grey landscape," but then lightened it on the advice of his son, Philip, who thought it looked "cold and miserable."⁵ On its exhibition at the New Gallery in 1897, the critics also found it rather somber (the *Magazine of Art* called it "painfully subdued"), but alleviated by a sweet sadness that was emphasized by Burne-Jones's quotation in the catalogue of lines by Swinburne, to whom the work was dedicated:

Love that is first and last of all things made,
The light that moving has man's life for shade.

Writing in the *Athenaeum*, F. G. Stephens considered the figure of Love "physically of the somewhat feminine type we often find in [Burne-Jones's] work," but thought the countenance "strenuous, beautiful, even nobly cruel in his sympathy for the acolyte"; in contrast, the Pilgrim's "weariness is manifest, and his sufferings are so obvious as to detract from our satisfaction in his victory, should it come to pass."⁶ The head of the Pilgrim is that of an Italian model named Giacinto; as John Christian has noted, "At one stage the figure was given a beard so that no one should mistake it for a woman, but this was removed before the picture was finished."⁷

1. De Lisle 1904, p. 115.

2. See Frances Horner 1933 and "Sir John and Lady Horner," Abdy and Gere 1984, chap. 10.

3. There are seven other such sheets of studies: another in Birmingham (458'27) and six in the National Museum of Wales, Cardiff (see Arts Council 1975–76, no. 326). Having been put in, the birds proved something of a nuisance to later retouching, as T. M. Rooke's studio diary records, on November 27, 1895: "(Taking out some of the work around Love's feet, finding a bird painted on the rocks there much in the way.) Bother that bird—damn the robins" (Lago 1981, p. 58).

4. Lago 1981, p. 51. Later that year he confessed: "But what between my extraordinary love of bright colour and my extraordinary love of dark colour and my extraordinary love of chiaroscuro and my extraordinary

love of a hard clear line—among my many loves I get into difficulties" (ibid., p. 66, entry for December 12, 1895).

5. Ibid., p. 100.

6. *Athenaeum*, May 22, 1897, p. 686.

7. Arts Council 1975–76, p. 65.

78.

Romaunt of the Rose: The Pilgrim at the Gate of Idleness

1884

Oil on canvas, 38¼ x 51½ in. (97 x 131 cm)

Signed: EBJ 1874 1884

PROVENANCE: William Connal; his sale, Christie's, March 14, 1908, lot 34; Maharajah of Jamnagar; Sotheby's Belgravia, April 9, 1980, lot 60; Roy Miles Fine Paintings, London

EXHIBITED: "International Exhibition," Glasgow, 1888, no. 31; New Gallery 1892–93, no. 64

Dallas Museum of Art. Foundation for the Arts Collection, Mrs. John B. O'Hara Fund (1996.44FA)

The two dates inscribed by the artist imply that Burne-Jones conceived this painting at an early stage in the development of the imagery for the series. He completed this and a companion painting of the same size, *The Heart of the Rose*, signed and dated 1889, for the Glasgow collector William Connal.

In his dream the poet finally discovers an entrance to the walled enclosure. Knocking at the gate, he is welcomed by the figure of Idleness, who bids him enter. Burne-Jones is faithful to the text in rendering exactly the description of the "fair maiden," clothed in green and wearing white gloves, with a garland of roses in her hair. For this and the other oil, William Morris provided an explanatory quatrain:

Lo, idleness opes the gate
Where through the wandering man awaits
So many fair and gallant shows
Born of the Romance of the Rose.

79.

Romaunt of the Rose: The Heart of the Rose

ca. 1889

Charcoal and colored chalks, 37¼ x 51¼ in. (95 x 131.4 cm)

PROVENANCE: First studio sale, Christie's, July 16, 1898, lot 33; bequeathed by Cecil French, 1954

EXHIBITED: Arts Council 1975–76, no. 189

William Morris Gallery, Walthamstow (London Borough of Waltham Forest; D187)

NEW YORK AND BIRMINGHAM



78



79



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It was Burne-Jones's common practice to work out subjects on a large scale in chalk or pastel, before or even during work on a major oil painting, for guidance in color and tone. This cartoon reproduces the composition of *The Heart of the Rose*, the companion painting to *The Pilgrim at the Gate of Idleness*, completed for William Connal in 1889.¹ An earlier design in pencil, with the female figure more literally perched in the rosebush, is in the "Secret" *Book of Designs* (cat. no. 140).²

The *Romaunt of the Rose* follows Guillaume de Lorris in offering the poet a vision of the rose through an enchanted mirror. In this composition Burne-Jones makes a literal rendering of the personification of ideal love, enthroned within a rosebush; clearly this was intended to match and complement the appearance of Idleness in the other oil, even retaining the green dress to maintain color balance. The winged figure of the God of Love offers a distant echo of Burne-Jones's depictions of Cupid and Amor in watercolors and decorative designs of the early 1860s (see cat. no. 29). Morris's verse offers a simple gloss:

The ending of the tale ye see;
The lover draws anigh the tree,

And takes the branch, and takes the rose,
That love and he so dearly chose.

1. Reproduced in color (along with *The Pilgrim at the Gate of Idleness*) in *Viva Victoria* (exh. cat., London: Roy Miles Fine Paintings Ltd., June 4–27, 1980), pp. 44–47.
2. British Museum, London (1899–7–13–390).

80.

Romaunt of the Rose: The Heart of the Rose (L'Amant)

1881

Black chalk over pencil, 35⁷/₈ x 47⁷/₈ in. (91.1 x 121.6 cm)

Signed: EBJ 1881

EXHIBITED: Herron Museum of Art 1964, no. 25

Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Gift in memory of Charles Eliot Norton from his children, Richard Norton, Sara Norton, Rupert Norton, Eliot Norton, Margaret Norton and Elizabeth Gaskell Norton, 1927 (27.646)



81

81. Romaunt of the Rose: The Heart of the Rose

1901

Wool and silk tapestry on cotton warp, 59 x 79 7/8 in. (150 x 201 cm);
executed by Morris & Company

PROVENANCE: Mr. Wylie, Glasgow; J. Fleming, Bognor Regis

EXHIBITED: Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery 1981, no. T21

Badisches Landesmuseum, Karlsruhe (72/147)

NEW YORK AND PARIS

In the embroidery (cat. no. 72) the poet reaches out to touch the vision of the rose, represented by a full-length figure inside a flowering bush. Burne-Jones must have been dissatisfied with this idea, since the revised large-scale drawing presents a more visionary treatment of the rose, as a beautiful but disembodied head at the center of a perfect, outsize rosebud. This is more in keeping with the spirit of the Chaucerian poem, in which the narrator is deterred from grasping the rose for fear of harm from its protective thorns.

The drawing (cat. no. 80) has acquired the title *L'Amant*, which, while it derives from the Chaucer *Romaunt of the Rose*, pertains to a later part of the story, in which the poet debates the nature of love with Reason.

After the completion of the Holy Grail series, Morris & Company may have intended to embark on another cycle of tapestries reproducing Burne-Jones's major designs for the *Romaunt of the Rose*. The only two subjects to be woven, however, were both executed after Burne-Jones's death: *The Heart of the Rose* (also known as *The Pilgrim in the Garden*), in 1901, and *Love Leading the Pilgrim*, in 1909.¹ The tapestry gives a splendid re-creation of the color never imparted to this subject on canvas, but Burne-Jones would probably not have approved of the addition of decorative lilies in the foreground, unmistakably the work of the firm's later chief designer, John Henry Dearle (1860–1932).

1. See Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery 1981, pp. 63, 110–11. A second version of *The Heart of the Rose* is at Rhodes House, Oxford, while two tapestries were made of *Love and the Pilgrim*: the first, of 1909, is in the Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery (52'12).



82



Edward Burne-Jones, *Sponsa de Libano* (*The Bride of Lebanon*), 1891. Watercolor and bodycolor, 128 x 61 in. (332.5 x 155.5 cm). Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool

82.

The Song of Solomon ("Awake O North Wind")

ca. 1876

Pencil, 14 x 8 $\frac{7}{8}$ in. (35.5 x 21.2 cm)

Inscribed with verses from the Vulgate, Song of Solomon, 4:16, 7:6. SURGE AQUILIO ET VENI AUSTER PERFLA HORTUM MEUM ET FLUANT AROMATA ILLIUS (*Awake O North wind, and come thou South, blow upon my garden that the spices thereof may flow out*); QUAM PULCHRA ES ET QUAM DECORA CHARISSIMA IN DELICIIS (*How fair and pleasant art thou, O Love, for delights*)

PROVENANCE: Bequeathed by J. R. Holliday, 1927

EXHIBITED: Arts Council 1975–76, no. 313; Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna 1986, no. 147

Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery (1927P463)

NEW YORK AND BIRMINGHAM



83

83.

The Song of Solomon ("Who is this that cometh out of the wilderness?")

ca. 1876

Pencil, 13 1/4 x 8 in. (35 x 20.3 cm)

INSCRIBED: EBJ and with verses from the Vulgate, Song of Solomon, 7:6, 16:4: QUAE EST ISTA QUAE ASCENDIT DE DESERTO DELICHIIS AFFLUENS INNIXA SUPER DILECTUM SUUM (Who is this that cometh out of the wilderness leaning upon her beloved?)

PROVENANCE: George Frederic Watts; presented by Mrs. G. F. Watts, 1924

EXHIBITED: Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna 1986, no. 148; Art Services International 1995–96, no. 101

Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery (1924P92)
NEW YORK AND BIRMINGHAM

Known also as the Song of Songs or the Canticles, the Song of Solomon was a natural choice of biblical subject for Burne-Jones, having little overt religious content but much in the way of lyrical word-painting and allegorical allusion.

Described by Burne-Jones in his work record as “designs from the Song of Solomon—for painting on panel some day,” a sequence of five large pencil drawings has usually been associated with other designs of a vertical format, destined to be executed in needlework (see cat. no. 130), although only one such embroidery is known.¹ They are of an exceptional precision and delicacy, extending beyond even the *Aeneid* drawings (cat. no. 66) in the artist’s meticulous delight in elaborating the loops and swirls of the drapery’s clinging to even more elongated figures. Malcolm Bell, the artist’s first biographer, identified the likely source of these hieratic figures in the fifteenth-century engravings by Baccio Baldini and Antonio Pollaiuolo after Botticelli, and especially the edition of Dante published by Niccolo di Lorenzo della Magna in 1481.²

The two sheets now at Birmingham are the third and the last in the set. The first four subjects are devoted to Solomon’s expression of love, both spiritual and sensual, for his beloved,

the Bride of Lebanon, whom he finally reveals to the world. Her statuesque depiction with the symbolic representation of the winds was later converted into a huge watercolor, exhibited at the New Gallery in 1891 under the title *Sponsa de Libano*.³

1. Harrison and Waters 1973, p. 118. The other three drawings, which were exhibited at the Burlington Fine Arts Club in 1899 (no. 141), belonged to Frances Horner (née Graham), who worked a number of pieces of embroidery after Burne-Jones’s designs.

2. Bell 1892, p. 102.

3. Burne-Jones’s idiosyncratic mixture of seriousness and humor is conveyed by this anecdote, concerning the 1891 watercolor: “In a letter to Lady Rayleigh there is mention of a scene with a model from whom he drew the heads of the Winds who breathe upon the garden of the Bride. ‘I drew the South wind one day and the North wind the next. Such a queer little model I had, a little Houndsditch Jewess, self-possessed, mature and worldly, and only about twelve years old. When I said to her, ‘Think of nothing and feel silly and look wild and blow with your lips,’ she threw off Houndsditch in a moment, and she might have been born in Lebanon, instead of the Cockney which she was’” (*Memorials*, vol. 2, p. 215).

Fame at Home and Abroad

The “seven blissfullest years of work” ended abruptly in 1877, when Burne-Jones contributed eight paintings to the first exhibition at the newly built Grosvenor Gallery.¹ Opened on May 1 in the heart of the London art world at 135–7 New Bond Street (fig. 85), the gallery was the brainchild of Sir Coutts Lindsay, Scottish landowner, connoisseur, and an amateur artist himself. His wife, Blanche, was also a talented painter, and it was she, a Rothschild, who defrayed much of the building’s cost. The Lindsays’ intimate involvement with the project, which included their own work and that of other titled amateurs appearing at the annual exhibitions, gave it from the outset an aristocratic tone. The private view was a great and well-publicized social event, and the Prince and Princess of Wales headed a glittering list of celebrity guests at the opening dinner. This was held in the basement restaurant, a novel and popular amenity.

In keeping with the Lindsays’ taste, the architect, W. J. Sams, had designed a building in the Italian style; indeed, the doorway was said to be by Palladio, having come from a demolished church in Venice.² The decoration was so sumptuous that it was generally considered to kill the pictures it had been designed to enhance, but the lighting was sensitive, and the introduction of electricity in 1882 was a great innovation. The display of the pictures was equally revolutionary. At the Royal Academy and other older institutions it was customary to hang them like postage stamps from floor to ceiling and to scatter an artist’s exhibits. At the Grosvenor they were hung together and given plenty of space to further increase their impact. This was not the only way in which the Grosvenor set out to be a liberal alternative to the Academy, which had since 1869 been established less than a mile away in Burlington House, Piccadilly. Whereas at the Academy an artist had to submit his pictures to a committee, which had the power to accept or reject them, at the Grosvenor artists were invited to contribute by Sir Coutts and his two lieutenants, Charles Hallé and Joseph Comyns Carr, who would tour the studios beforehand, selecting suitable exhibits. The aim was to make the Grosvenor a showcase for all that was most adventurous in modern British art, and it was immediately perceived as the

flagship of the Aesthetic movement. Certainly Academicians exhibited, including old Sir Francis Grant, the president, Frederic Leighton, who was to succeed Grant the following year to become the most prestigious holder of the office since Reynolds, and his two fellow classicists Poynter and Alma-Tadema. But Grant’s aristocratic portraits were in keeping with the social ethos, while the three classicists all in some degree subscribed to the cult of beauty, which was synonymous with Aestheticism. Other progressive artists who showed at the opening exhibition included Whistler, Moore, Watts, Legros, Hubert von Herkomer, James Tissot (resident in London since the Franco-Prussian War), and two exponents of the Etruscan school of landscape painting, Leighton’s friend Giovanni Costa and Burne-Jones’s former pupil and current patron, George Howard. The older Pre-Raphaelite generation was represented by Millais and Holman Hunt, but Rossetti and Madox Brown declined to exhibit, Rossetti



Figure 85. Grosvenor Gallery, New Bond Street, London. From a wood engraving published in the *Illustrated London News*, May 5, 1877

objecting to the inclusion of Academicians and Brown showing his usual touchiness.

In writing to the Grosvenor management to explain why he could not participate, Rossetti paid generous tribute to Burne-Jones, emphasizing that his association alone would ensure the project's success. Even he, however, can hardly have foreseen the truth of this prophecy. Burne-Jones's eight pictures, all large in scale, were *The Beguiling of Merlin* (cat. no. 64) and *The Mirror of Venus* (fig. 86), both of which belonged to Leyland, *The Days of Creation* (fig. 79), which had been bought by Graham, and five single standing figures: *Temperantia* (1872–73; private collection), *Fides* (fig. 81), *Spes* (1871–77; Art Gallery, Dunedin), *A Sibyl* (1877; private collection), and *Saint George* (cat. no. 85). All hung together in the West Gallery, the main room on the first floor—the three large compositions below, *The Days of Creation* in the middle, and the single figures in a row above. It was an overwhelming demonstration of his mature powers, all the more dramatic since he had been absent from London galleries for so long. Moreover, his own presence was supported by that of three followers, Spencer Stanhope, J. M. Strudwick, and Walter Crane, all of whom were also shown in the West Gallery, and of two women who were working in the same tradition, Marie Spartali (1844–1927) and Evelyn Pickering (1855–1919); one of the virtues of the Grosvenor was that it supported and promoted women artists. In other words, an entire school suddenly seemed to have emerged, with Burne-Jones as its undisputed leader. No other artist on display could compete. Overnight he was famous, the star of the Grosvenor and the doyen of Aestheticism in its fully developed form.

This did not of course mean that the pictures were universally liked. On the contrary, an art that made so few conces-

sions to popular taste, that appealed over the heads of the philistine hordes to a select and cultured minority, that was, in a word, elitist was bound to raise some hackles. As the *Times* put it, "To a great many . . . these pictures are unintelligible puzzles, of which they do not care to attempt the solution; to others they are occasions of angry antagonism or contemptuous ridicule. To a large majority of the crowd who will soon be thronging the [Royal] Academy galleries, such pictures as these seem unaccountable freaks of individual eccentricity, or the strange and unwholesome fruits of hopeless wanderings in the mazes of mysticism and medievalism."³ Many reviewed the show, including Oscar Wilde, who, though still an undergraduate, had himself caused a sensation by appearing at the private view in a specially tailored coat in the shape of a cello. A few, like the partisan Sidney Colvin, were wildly enthusiastic. Burne-Jones's paintings, he wrote in the *Fortnightly Review*, constituted "an exhibition in themselves . . . we have among us a genius, a poet in design and colour, whose like has never been seen before."⁴ Many more harped on the artist's supposedly morbid vision, unmanly types, and lack of realism, apparently unaware that for him to change in any of these respects would have been totally self-destructive. By far the most intelligent appraisal of the bewildering new style was made by Henry James in the *Galaxy*. "It is the art of culture," he wrote, "of reflection, of intellectual luxury, of aesthetic refinement, of people who look at the world and at life not directly, as it were, and in all its accidental reality, but in the reflection and ornamental portrait of it furnished by art itself in other manifestations; furnished by literature, by poetry, by history, by erudition." To some extent he was prepared to agree with the critics who complained that the artist's figures were lacking in "manhood" and looked



Figure 86. Edward Burne-Jones, *The Mirror of Venus*, 1873–77. Oil on canvas, 48 x 78½ in. (122 x 199.5 cm). Calouste Gulbenkian Museum, Lisbon

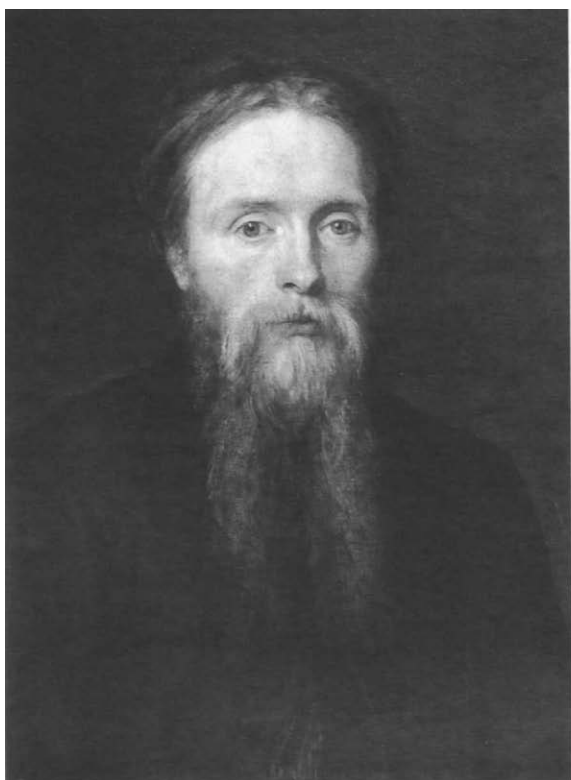


Figure 87. George Frederic Watts (1817–1904), *Edward Burne-Jones*, 1870. Oil on canvas, 25½ x 20½ in. (64.8 x 52 cm). Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery



Figure 88. Edward Poynter (1836–1919), *Georgiana Burne-Jones*, 1870. Watercolor, 14 x 10 in. (35.5 x 25.4 cm). Private collection

“debauched and debilitated.” He himself found them somewhat “weak and weary.” Nonetheless, he was convinced that the eight paintings “place[d] their author quite at the head of the English painters of our day, and very high among all the painters of this degenerate time.” Whatever their limitations, they possessed “an enchanting purity, and the perfection with which the painter has mastered the type that seems to say so much to his imagination is something rare in a day of vulgar and superficial study. In the palace of art there are many chambers, and that of which Mr Burne-Jones holds the key is a wondrous museum. His imagination, his fertility of invention, his exquisiteness of work, his remarkable gifts as a colourist, cruelly discredited as they are by the savage red wall at the Grosvenor—all these things constitute a brilliant distinction.”⁵

Burne-Jones’s success at the Grosvenor was more than a matter of artistic excellence; it was the triumph of a personality cult. For all his love of peace and seclusion, he was in his way a larger-than-life character, with formidable skills as a self-publicist and the creator of his own legend. Curiosity must have been aroused by the fact that the exhibition included not only so much of his work but also Watts’s haunting portrait of him (fig. 87), looking every inch the seer and poet, and even a likeness of Georgie by Edward Poynter (fig. 88). Certainly it did not take long for the image of a man as fascinating as his paintings to impinge on the public mind.

Graham Robertson, who fell under his spell as a boy at the first Grosvenor exhibition and met him soon afterward at The Grange, has left a description of the visit which includes all the salient features of the emerging Burne-Jones myth. Appropriately, the master lives in a romantic house, remote and withdrawn from the world:

The Grange, an old, dark red house, once the home of Samuel Richardson of “Pamela,” stood back from the road behind a wall and an iron gate. Within the gate, and even more within the large low hall, furnished like a living-room, into which the front door opened, the impression conveyed was that of unusual quiet, a hush almost suggesting the Sleeping Palace of Faerie lore save that there was no-drowsiness in the spell; the house seemed to hold its breath lest a sound should disturb the worker.

The boy is taken through mysterious rooms, “shadowy with . . . deep-green leaf-patterned walls” and glowing with painted furniture and Old Masters. Then from the drawing-room, an austere apartment hung with engravings by Mantegna and Dürer and with reduced casts of Michelangelo’s *Day* and *Evening* “brooding” over the fireplace, he is led out through the French windows “across a lawn to where under a big mulberry-tree sat a tiny lady; as she turned to receive me I met



Figure 89. Edward Burne-Jones, *The Hours*, 1870–83. Oil on canvas, 34 x 72¼ in. (86.5 x 183.5 cm). Sheffield Art Gallery

her eyes and became aware of a great personality. The quiet in those wonderful eyes of clearest grey was, I knew, the centre of the strange stillness that lay upon the place, yet beneath and beyond could be sensed an energy, dominant, flame-like.” This, of course, was Georgie.

We are then introduced to the artist’s children, Philip, “hospitable and excitable,” and Margaret, still a “grave little girl” but destined to become one of the beauties of her day and a vital component of the myth, since she was known to be the apple of her father’s eye and to appear in many of his pictures. At last the master himself appears:

He walked out of the house and came down the garden towards us, and I was at once relieved to see that he was not going to turn out a disappointment. His face with its great width across the eyes and brows, tapering oddly towards the chin, was strangely like his own pictorial type; its intense pallor gave it a luminous appearance added to by his large grey-blue eyes and silvered hair; his long coat and high waistcoat produced an impression indefinitely clerical; he wore a dark blue shirt and a blue tie drawn through a ring in which was set a pale blue jewel.

He might have been a priest newly stepped down from the altar, the thunder of great litanies still in his ears, a mystic with spirit but half recalled from the threshold of another and a fairer world; but as one gazed in reverence the hieratic calm of the face would be broken by a smile so mischievous, so quaintly malign, as to unfrock the priest at once and transform the mage into the conjurer at a children’s party. The change was almost startling; it was like meeting the impish eyes of Puck beneath the

cowl of a monk. Yet neither of these entities was a disguise; the monk was quite genuine, so was the elf, and in the uncertainty as to which of the two might turn up lay a strange fascination.⁶

Many noticed this duality. Paderewski, who first saw him from the window of a cab, recalled how “even at that distance he radiated an unusual kind of power and nobility. He had the expression of an apostle . . . [but,] contrary to his appearance, . . . was full of humour.”⁷ Charles Eliot Norton even likened him to Shakespeare in his ability to unite “the poetic imagination and the artistic temperament with the traits of a large, generous, deep nature.”⁸ Henry James, whatever his reservations about Burne-Jones’s painting, had none about the man himself. Seeing him, he told Norton in 1886, “is one of the best human pleasures that London has for me. . . . He is, as you know, exquisite in mind and task—and we fraternise greatly.”⁹ That “talk”—witty, erudite, whimsical, and uttered in what Kipling called his “golden voice”—was one of his greatest attractions. William Graham’s daughter Frances recalled in her memoirs: “He used to come to our house in Grosvenor Place and dine two or three times a week. . . . He was without exception the best talker I have ever known, and no party could be dull or flat for a moment if he was there.”¹⁰ Something of the magic his listeners felt still comes across in the *Memorials* and the records of conversation in the studio which T. M. Rooke kept during the last years of his master’s life.¹¹ Burne-Jones expressed himself equally well in letters, which, despite his claims to the contrary, he clearly enjoyed writing. Hundreds survive in libraries and private collections, often illustrated with humorous sketches.

Without doubt, Burne-Jones had enormous charm and a mind remarkable both for its intellectual riches and its depth of human understanding. So acute an observer as Henry James would surely have noted any superficiality; as it was, he merely continued to pay tributes after the artist's death, recalling him as "the most charming of friends," who "grew only more loveable, natural and wise."¹² Yet Burne-Jones had his faults. His tone of voice could be breathless and insinuating in a way that grates. This was more than a matter of "period"; Rossetti clearly found the trait irritating, writing to Jane Morris in February 1881 that their friend's "style in conversation is getting beyond the pussy-cat and attaining the dicky-bird."¹³ Nor did everyone swallow the Burne-Jones legend. Jeannette Marshall, the daughter of Dr. John Marshall, professor of anatomy at the Royal Academy Schools, recorded a garden party at The Grange in 1886 at which "a ghastly and aesthetic company was assembled."¹⁴ There was a long estrangement between Burne-Jones and Madox Brown, and at least two people, Charles Augustus Howell and the writer Violet Hunt, came to have an undying hatred of the artist and all his works. None of these cases is simple. Miss Marshall seems to have been a disagreeable girl; Brown seldom lost an opportunity of taking offense; Howell, as well as being a notoriously untrustworthy businessman, earned Burne-Jones's animosity by involving himself in the Zambaco affair; and Violet Hunt was one of the most unpleasant women in the whole circle. Nonetheless, some of Burne-Jones's enemies do seem to have had a grievance. He was thoughtless, even cruel, in his relations with Brown,¹⁵ and pursued Howell with a degree of vindictiveness that was, to say the least, unnecessary.

This unappealing characteristic emerges again when we examine his part in the Ruskin-Whistler libel case, which resulted from the first Grosvenor Gallery exhibition. As is well known, Ruskin reviewed the show in *Fors Clavigera*, his monthly letter "to the workmen and labourers of Great Britain." Not surprisingly, he heaped compliments on Burne-Jones. "His work," he wrote, ". . . is simply the only art-work at present produced in England which will be received by the future as 'classic' in its kind. . . . I know that these [pictures] will be immortal." He then went on to make a vicious attack on Whistler, writing of one of his most abstract works in the exhibition, the *Nocturne in Black and Gold: The Falling Rocket* (1875; Detroit Institute of Arts): "I have seen, and heard, much of Cockney impudence before now; but never expected to hear a coxcomb ask two hundred guineas for flinging a pot of paint in the public's face."¹⁶ The comments were reported in the national press, Whistler sued for libel, and the most famous court case in art history took place the following year.

Burne-Jones was Ruskin's principal witness, and it has always been assumed, from his own protestations and

Georgie's and other contemporary accounts, that he entered the box with the greatest reluctance, pressurized by Ruskin and deeply embarrassed at having to testify against a fellow artist, indeed one with whom he had once had much in common. Linda Merrill, however, has recently published evidence which suggests that he actually played a more dubious role, at first rushing to support Ruskin and provide Ruskin's lawyers with ammunition, then losing his nerve, giving confusing evidence in court, and finally, when Ruskin lost the case and he was afraid that he would be blamed, putting it about that he had hated the business from the start.¹⁷ It would appear, in other words, that, whatever their earlier friendship and professional relations, Burne-Jones had developed a deep-seated resentment of Whistler, and seized the opportunity to discredit him. Merrill suggests that the trouble had started with a quarrel between Whistler and Legros in 1867, in which Burne-Jones had sided with Legros. Certainly the two men were totally different in character, and the fact that Whistler was still on amicable terms with Howell, now Burne-Jones's sworn enemy, cannot have helped.

Technically the winner but bankrupted by costs, Whistler retreated to Venice, staying away for fourteen months and leaving Burne-Jones in undisputed possession of the field.



Figure 90. Edward Burne-Jones, *Helen Mary Gaskell*, 1898. Pencil, 17 x 9⁵/₈ in. (43.2 x 24.5 cm). Private collection



Figure 92. Edward Burne-Jones, *Heds of Despight, Cruelty, and Dame Amoret*, a study for *The Masque of Cupid*, 1872 (Plymouth Art Gallery), from a photograph by Frederick Hollyer (1837–1933)

Left: Figure 91. Norman Mansbridge (b. 1911). *Her First Audition*. One of the series “Masterpieces of Victorian Art Restored,” published in *Punch*, May 12, 1954

One personality cult had eclipsed another, although Whistler's turn would come. Not that Burne-Jones needed Whistler's absence to sustain his ascendancy at the Grosvenor, where his success of 1877 was amply consolidated during the next few years. In 1878 he showed eight pictures, the most important of which were Graham's two Giorgionesque masterpieces, *Le Chant d'Amour* (cat. no. 84) and *Laus Veneris* (cat. no. 63), both, as we know, large reworkings in oil of earlier watercolors. Reviews followed much the same pattern as before. Henry James praised the two main contributions for having “the great and rare merit that they are *pictures*. They are conceptions, representations; they have a great *ensemble*.” He could not, however, resist poking fun at them too, observing that Venus in *Laus Veneris* had “the face and aspect of a person who has had what the French call an ‘intimate’ acquaintance with life,” while the figures in *Le Chant d'Amour* were “seated, in rather an unexpected manner, upon the top of a garden wall.”¹⁸ These Venetian works were followed in 1879–80 by a group of pictures in a much colder and more classical idiom: the Pygmalion series (cat. nos. 87a–l), in itself a meditation on the subject of Greek sculpture, *The Annunciation* (cat. no. 104), and the nearly monochromatic *Golden Stairs* (cat. no. 109).

In 1881 Burne-Jones showed nothing, causing James to observe that “a Grosvenor without Mr Burne-Jones is a *Hamlet* with *Hamlet* left out.”¹⁹ But in 1882 he returned in force with nine pictures, among them *The Tree of Forgiveness* (cat. no. 114), *The Feast of Peleus* (cat. no. 51), and *The Mill* (cat. no. 111). The last was the most important of his works to be acquired by Constantine Ionides, by now established as the autocratic head of London's Anglo-Greek community and not, incidentally, at all sympathetic to Burne-Jones's liaison

with Maria Zambaco.

The Hours (fig. 89) and *The Wheel of Fortune* (cat. no. 52) followed in 1883. The first was an Albert Moore-like group of seated figures conceived in the 1860s but overlaid with a Mantegnesque veneer as it developed. Burne-Jones described it as “a row of six little women that typify the hours of day from waking to sleep. Their little knees look so funny in a row that wit descended on me from above, and I called them ‘the laps of time.’ Every little lady besides the proper colour of her own frock wears a lining of the colour of the hour before her and a sleeve of the hour coming after—so that Mr Whistler could, if he liked, call it a fugue.”²⁰ *Fortune* belonged to Arthur Balfour (1848–1930), who had commissioned the Perseus series in 1875. A rising Tory politician and amateur philosopher (which is perhaps why he liked *Fortune*), Balfour was a leading figure in the social group known as The Souls, which came to prominence in the 1880s. Eschewing the vulgar hedonism of the Prince of Wales's Marlborough House set, they cultivated aesthetic and intellectual interests, and Burne-Jones was their favorite painter. Frances Graham (cat. no. 107)—Mrs. (later Lady) Horner from her marriage in 1883—was another luminary. Indeed, the redoubtable Lady Paget called her the “high priestess” of the coterie, a reflection not so much of her social position as of the fact that she was known to be on intimate terms with Burne-Jones. In later life he indulged in a number of sentimental but platonic relationships with young women. Frances was the most important of these Egerias, followed by Helen Mary Gaskell (fig. 90), although her star was not to rise until the 1890s.

Burne-Jones's success at the Grosvenor reached a climax in 1884 when, at the age of fifty-one, he exhibited *King Cophetua*

and the Beggar Maid (cat. no. 112). One of his largest and most elaborate canvases so far, it had been designed in 1875 and caused him enormous trouble before it was finished. The subject was taken from a medieval ballad that had already inspired a poem by Tennyson, and the conception seems to owe something both to Mantegna's *Madonna della Vittoria* (1496) in the Louvre, of which we know Burne-Jones owned a photograph, and Crivelli's great *Annunciation* (1486), which had entered the National Gallery in London in 1864. The picture is richer in tone than those of 1879–80 or the steely *Wheel of Fortune*, while in mood it strikes a more somber note than almost anything the artist had yet painted on this scale. Georgie may well have been right in suggesting that it sprang from the same impulse that was currently drawing Morris to socialism,²¹ for although this was a move to which Burne-Jones was not sympathetic, he himself held radical political views, having little use for either the monarchy or empire. It was generally accepted that *King Cophetua* represented his greatest achievement to date, a view summed up by the *Times* when it declared that it was "not only the finest work that Mr Burne-Jones has ever painted, but . . . one of the finest pictures ever painted by an Englishman."²² It was acquired by the Earl of Wharnccliffe, a prominent patron of his brother-in-law Edward Poynter, and was the first work by him to enter the Tate Gallery. Subscribers presented it to the national collection in 1900.

Fashions in Burne-Jones change. Twenty years ago, when the revival started, *The Beguiling of Merlin* (cat. no. 64), with its overt sexual overtones, seemed to capture the youthful imagination, appearing on Athena posters and elsewhere. Earlier in the century its presence in the Tate had ensured that *King Cophetua* was the best known image. The Victoria and Albert Museum's display of popular twentieth-century metalwork includes a biscuit tin of 1932 on which the picture is reproduced.²³ R. H. Wilenski's jibe in 1933 about "Wardour Street bric-à-brac" has already been noted, and in May 1954 the picture was satirized by Norman Mansbridge in *Punch*, retitled *Her First Audition* (fig. 91).

At the height of the Aesthetic movement itself *The Golden Stairs* (cat. no. 109) had a strong claim to be Burne-Jones's most famous picture. A generation of young women saw themselves as the damsels descending the eponymous staircase, "trooping past like spirits in an enchanted dream," as F. G. Stephens phrased it in the *Athenaeum*, with a hint that the artist was inspired by Piero della Francesca.²⁴ The fact that the sitters were known to include a number of beautiful, well-connected, and fashionable young women in the artist's circle—Margaret Burne-Jones, May Morris, Frances Graham, Mary Gladstone, Mary Stuart Wortley, and others—added to the picture's popular appeal. Not surprisingly, it is said to have

been a source of inspiration for Gilbert and Sullivan's satire on the Aesthetic craze, the comic opera *Patience*, first staged in 1881.

Like that of so many Victorian artists, Burne-Jones's fame owed much to reproductions, although it was typical that he shunned the conventional steel engravings that gave currency to the work of such popular figures as Millais, Edwin Landseer, and William Powell Frith. Instead, from the early 1880s, he went to great lengths to find talented young printmakers who would reproduce his pictures by etching, engraving, or mezzotint in such a way as to create semi-independent works of art. He found his best interpreters in France, the most brilliant of whom was the Polish-born Félix-Stanislas Jasinski (1862–1901). Published in small editions, often on vellum and signed by both artist and engraver, these prints were relatively expensive, but Burne-Jones was also prepared to let his work be reproduced photographically at a lower cost. From the 1860s, inspired by early German printmaking, he had considered designing cheap woodcuts that would be within reach of everyone's pocket, and in a sense photography realized this ambition. *King Cophetua* and the four Briar Rose paintings were superbly rendered in photogravure, but a more significant development was his association with Frederick Hollyer (1837–1933), a Kensington photographer who, as well as taking portraits (including several of Burne-Jones and his family; see fig. 94), specialized in reproducing artists' paintings and drawings. His treatment of Burne-Jones's drawings is particularly remarkable. Delicately printed full scale on mat paper, and sometimes, it seems, even touched with pencil to give added authenticity, they are incredibly deceptive and often taken for originals. Two in particular turn up time and again, a study of three heads for *The Masque of Cupid* (fig. 92; cat. nos. 60, 61) and a profile portrait of Paderewski.²⁵ Hollyer's prints had a great vogue. They are said to have been common



Figure 93. North End House, Rottingdean. From a watercolor by Edward Poynter (1836–1919). Reproduced in Angela Thirkell, *Three Houses* (1931)

in the rooms of Oxford aesthetes of the Wilde generation, joining the Morris wallpaper, the peacock feathers, and the blue-and-white pots, and no doubt they abounded in Bedford Park, Norman Shaw's garden suburb in West London, which sprang up in the late 1870s and teemed with artistically and socially conscious inhabitants, including T. M. Rooke. The fame of *The Golden Stairs* owed much to the fact that it was reproduced by both Jasinski and Hollyer, who also photographed the preparatory drawings. Lady Battersea, who owned the picture, left an amusing description of an encounter with two Frenchwomen, both ardent fans of Burne-Jones. "Ah, how beautiful is his picture called *The Golden Stairs*!" said the older lady. . . . 'I am so glad,' I replied, 'for I have it.' 'Indeed!' said the lady, 'and what may be the size of the engraving?' 'Oh,' I answered, 'there are many sizes . . . [but] I have the picture itself.' 'You have the *original*?' screamed the lady—'the very original? . . . *O je vous en félicite!*' She jumped up and shook me by the hand."²⁶

There were many outward signs of Burne-Jones's success in the 1880s. In 1879 he was elected to the Athenaeum Club under a rule by which distinguished men were invited to join without application. The following year he was able to buy a country retreat at Rottingdean, near Brighton on the Sussex coast (fig. 93). In 1881 he received the honorary degree of Doctor of Civil Law at Oxford, and in 1883 he and Morris were made honorary Fellows of their old college, Exeter. The same year Ruskin devoted a Slade lecture to him, one of a series entitled "The Art of England," emphasizing, clearly with their "serious talk" in mind, his "deeply interesting function" as a "modern painter of mythology."²⁷ In 1885 he accepted the presidency of the Birmingham Society of Artists, and the same year saw him elected an associate of the Royal Academy in London. He had never exhibited a picture there but was an old friend of Leighton, who was trying to bring new blood into the Academy in answer to criticism that it was inward-looking and parochial. Burne-Jones's election was Leighton's greatest triumph, but his satisfaction was short-lived. Jealous of his freedom and, as he told Alma-Tadema, "particularly made by nature not to like Academies,"²⁸ Burne-Jones regretted his acceptance as soon as it was sent, and he exhibited only one picture at Burlington House, *The Depths of the Sea* (cat. no. 119), in 1886. When the academicians, sensing his reluctance, failed to make him a full member, embarrassment on both sides intensified, and in 1893, to Leighton's bitter disappointment, he resigned. It was almost a replay of his resignation in 1870 from the Old Water-Colour Society, although that was now ancient history and he allowed himself to be reelected to the Society in 1886.

Meanwhile, the Grosvenor itself was running into trouble. For a decade it remained a great cultural and social center. In

addition to the summer exhibitions of modern paintings, there were winter shows devoted to Old Master and modern drawings, the art of Reynolds, Gainsborough, and Van Dyck, and the collected works of Watts, Alma-Tadema, and Millais. Lady Lindsay's Sunday afternoon receptions were also immensely successful, attracting everyone who was anyone in the *haute bohème*. But in 1882 she separated from her husband, withdrawing her financial support from the gallery and forcing him to raise revenue by hiring it out for private functions, much to the detriment of its elevated tone. Burne-Jones watched these developments with dismay, and after the triumph of *King Cophetua*, his commitment to the place seemed to slacken. He showed nothing in 1885 and only relatively minor works in 1886, although in 1887 his contributions were more impressive. They included *The Baleful Head* (cat. no. 97), the first of Balfour's Perseus series to reach completion, a rather quirky likeness of Katie Lewis (cat. no. 118), the strong-willed young daughter of Sir George Lewis, his solicitor, and *The Garden of Pan* (cat. no. 120), the somewhat vestigial outcome of the "picture of the beginning of the world," which he had conceived in 1872. It was meant, he wrote, "to be a little foolish and . . . a reaction from the dazzle of London wit and wisdom,"²⁹ a jaundiced reference to the strenuous social activity of the season in the heyday of empire in which he found himself inextricably and in some ways reluctantly involved. But this was to be his last appearance at the Grosvenor. By now its problems had become acute, and Sir Coutts's two deputies, Hallé and Carr, resigned to launch their own gallery. Situated in Regent Street and built at great speed to ensure that it open the following summer, the New Gallery sought to recapture the idealism of its predecessor while avoiding its shortcomings. The Grosvenor struggled on for another two years, but the competition was too intense and it closed in 1890, a sad end to a gallant and by no means unsuccessful attempt to redefine the art establishment and give to art the absolute value so often denied it in England.

Burne-Jones played a crucial part in launching the New Gallery, siding with Hallé and Carr and, by agreeing to support their venture, making it financially viable. To the first exhibition he sent two more Perseus subjects, *The Rock of Doom* and *The Doom Fulfilled* (cat. nos. 95, 96), as well as *The Tower of Brass* (cat. no. 121), which is related thematically to the Perseus paintings, and a set of highly finished pencil drawings illustrating the story of Orpheus (cat. nos. 126–128). Other senior artists, including Watts and Leighton, also transferred their allegiance to the New Gallery, as did most of Burne-Jones's associates and followers. These would all outlive him, Spencer Stanhope dying in 1908, Crane in 1915, Evelyn Pickering (who had married the potter William De Morgan in 1887) and Fairfax Murray in 1919, Strudwick in 1937, Rooke



Figure 94. The Burne-Jones and Morris families in the garden at The Grange, 1874. Photograph by Frederick Hollyer (1837–1933). Left to right: Edward Richard Jones, the artist's father; Margaret, Edward, Philip, and Georgiana Burne-Jones; May and William Morris (standing behind), Jane and Jenny Morris (seated at right)

in 1942. A martyr to asthma, Stanhope had settled at Bellosguardo, outside Florence, in the early 1870s. He continued to paint, his work, much of it in tempera, growing increasingly mannered, while his house, the Villa Nuti, became a center for English residents and tourists. Burne-Jones and Morris visited him in 1873, and Evelyn De Morgan and her husband, who also suffered from bad health, were annual winter migrants. Stanhope's niece and a woman of relentless energy, Evelyn continued to paint large, technically highly competent yet curiously soulless allegories that were almost a parody of the Burne-Jones style and the Botticelli influence. Not surprisingly, Burne-Jones himself never liked them. As for the other followers, Crane died an immensely versatile and internationally renowned exponent of the Arts and Crafts, while Murray was increasingly involved with art dealing, forging a strong link with Agnew's. Strudwick seems to have given up painting shortly before the First World War, perhaps in response to changes in taste. Rooke too abandoned his figure subjects, but he had another string to his bow. During his years with Burne-Jones he had often been employed by Ruskin to make topographical drawings, and he long continued to practice this type of work.

All these artists are now the subject of interest, but no one, at the time or since, has regarded them as anything approaching the equal of Burne-Jones. They may reinterpret or even extend his pictorial territory, but the results, though often

beguiling, evocative, or powerful according to each personality, are essentially pedestrian beside the work of the master himself. We are reminded of Coleridge's famous distinction between Fancy and Imagination, one certainly known to this group of artists if only because Ruskin had adapted it in *Modern Painters*. Much late Pre-Raphaelite painting stops short at Fancy, seeing its subject matter, as Ruskin put it, from "the outside," however "clear, brilliant, and full of detail" that vision might be. Burne-Jones goes further, into realms where, to quote Ruskin again, "the imagination sees the heart and inner nature, and makes them felt, but is often obscure, mysterious, and interrupted, in its giving of outer detail."³⁰

Ruskin, as we know, had encouraged Burne-Jones to reveal "the heart and inner nature" of myths, and had implicitly claimed success for his mission in his lecture on him of 1883. The irony is that however much Ruskin may have helped him to self-discovery, Burne-Jones came to use mythological subjects for moralizing (if indeed that is the word) of a very un-Ruskinian type—to explore psychological and sexual tension, an anxiety-laden state of mind, the secret recesses of the soul. Nothing shows their divergence more vividly than Ruskin's reaction when Burne-Jones showed *The Depths of the Sea* (cat. no. 119) at the Royal Academy in 1886. In spirit the picture could hardly be more characteristic, yet Ruskin was "grieved and angered,"³¹ feeling that the artist had missed a great opportunity to present the world with an "ideal grotesque" of profound moral significance.

It was left to others to grasp the true nature of Burne-Jones's vision, seeing its neurotic edginess as peculiarly modern. Phrases such as "nervous irritability," an art which "answers to some craving of our time," and "medievalism with a difference . . . the modern spirit added to the ancient form," abound in contemporary criticism of his pictures.³² His son, Philip, wrote:

With all [his] passionate devotion to the past, . . . he was surely at heart a Modern of the Moderns. Deep, undoubtedly, was the influence which Italian art exercised over him, but . . . it was in reality with eyes immeasurably different from those of a Florentine in the days of Botticelli that he regarded the ancient world or sought to interpret its legacies. The sadness of expression in his faces . . . is due, I take it, partly to a certain Celtic melancholy which was constitutional and peculiar to the painter, and partly . . . to the unconscious reflection of the troubled and transitional age in which he lived; an age, it must be remembered, which bore the brunt of the first onslaught of a new and strange materialism upon old and established faiths, leaving its children lonely and wistful at the parting of the ways.³³

Despite the word “unconscious,” it is tempting to see this as an echo of conversations between the writer and his father, and to read it, not necessarily as a rejection of Ruskin but certainly as a concession to the more complex and sophisticated readings of art-historical imagery proposed by Swinburne and Pater. After all, Pater had described the *Mona Lisa* as “the symbol of the modern idea,” that is to say, “the idea of humanity as wrought upon by, and summing up in itself, all modes of thought and life.”³⁴ For the last time we seem to see Burne-Jones standing at a point where Ruskinian and Aesthetic values intersect; and at this deepest level, no longer that of form or even subject matter but fundamental meaning itself, it is the Aesthetic critics who triumph.

By the late 1880s another generation of Burne-Jones followers was emerging. A whole school had sprung up in Birmingham as a result of a visit he had paid to the Art School in 1885 and the impressive examples of his work with which he was furnishing his native city: *The Star of Bethlehem* (cat. no. 141), the colossal watercolor he painted for the new Art Gallery in 1888–91, and the four enormous stained-glass windows he designed for the cathedral in 1885–97. The artists concerned—J. E. Southall (1861–1944), A. J. Gaskin (1862–1928), S. H. Meteyard (1868–1947), and others—were all born in the 1860s, and their work has a homogeneous quality defined by the fact that they were deeply involved in the Arts and Crafts. Elsewhere the picture was more varied. There were artists, like E. R. Frampton (1872–1923) and Louis Davis (1860–1941), who modeled their work closely on his, again mainly in the decorative sphere, while others, like Robert Anning Bell (1863–1933), the Scotsman John Duncan (1866–1945), Charles Ricketts (1866–1931), and his friend Charles Shannon (1863–1937), saw him as a venerable figure but only one influence among many. Aubrey Beardsley (1872–1898) began by owing him much but ultimately diverged completely, upsetting his mentor on the way with his conceited behavior and by sending up the *Morte d'Arthur* in the edition he illustrated for the publisher Dent in 1893–94.

Burne-Jones's influence was also felt within the ranks of the Royal Academy, the institution he had treated with such disdain. The outstanding example is John William Waterhouse (1849–1917), who, having started his career as a follower of Alma-Tadema, developed a more lyrical style in the late 1880s, in which Burne-Jonesian moods and themes are expressed in a quasi-Impressionist technique. It is interesting that the two artists were both elected associates of the Royal Academy in 1885, so they probably met then if never again. Last but by no means least, Burne-Jones had a profound impact on exponents of the so-called New Sculpture, the group of young sculptors who came to prominence in the 1880s and who sought to endow their work with a new depth of meaning by



Figure 95. Fernand Khnopff (1858–1921). Archives de l'Art Contemporain en Belgique, Musées Royaux des Beaux-Arts, Brussels

modeling with great sensitivity and by exploiting symbolism, rare materials, and color. The leading figure and the closest to Burne-Jones was Alfred Gilbert (1854–1934), who met the painter in October 1884, when *King Cophetua* (cat. no. 112) was still in his studio. The picture, wrote Gilbert, “roused mingled feelings of wonder and joy, and I felt . . . a rush of enthusiasm and sympathy with the artist and his aims. . . . From that moment I became a humble proselyte [of] Burne-Jones.”³⁵ The outstanding expression of this “proselytism” is the sculptor’s masterpiece, the tomb at Windsor of the Duke of Clarence, who died in January 1892. It owes an unmistakable debt to Burne-Jones’s Briar Rose paintings, exhibited two years earlier.³⁶

By the late 1870s Burne-Jones was acquiring a reputation in France to match his fame at home. As early as 1869 an article on contemporary British painting by Philippe Burty in the *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* had mentioned his name and illustrated his design of *Pan and Psyche* (cat. no. 103). The Franco-Prussian War and the Commune (1870–71) increased this national awareness, bringing many French artists and writers to London, as well, incidentally, as models. “We are inundated with Paris models,” Burne-Jones wrote at the time, “ten or twelve will call in a morning . . . it is very miserable.”³⁷ But it was the opening of the Grosvenor Gallery that first placed his work in an international context, since the management was keen to show foreign artists alongside native talent. Giovanni Costa has already been mentioned as exhibiting in 1877.

Several Frenchmen were also represented, including Gustave Moreau, who contributed a version of his most famous composition, *The Apparition* (fig. 25).

The following year the compliment was returned when a number of British pictures that had been seen at the Grosvenor reappeared at the Exposition Universelle in Paris. In addition to major examples by Watts and Walter Crane, they included *The Beguiling of Merlin* (cat. no. 64) by Burne-Jones, who also showed two earlier watercolors, *Love Disguised as Reason* (1870–75; South African Cultural History Museum, Cape Town) and *Love among the Ruins* (1870–73; private collection). Despite the later claim by Arsène Alexandre in his obituary of the artist in *Le Figaro* that *Merlin* had created “une sensation extraordinaire,” press commentary seems to have been muted; but when *King Cophetua* appeared at the Exposition Universelle of 1889 it had an overwhelming success. Gustave Moreau, who was on the jury, insisted that the picture be awarded a gold medal, and the artist received the cross of the Légion d’honneur and was elected a corresponding member of the Académie des Beaux-Arts. “Burne-Jones,” wrote Antonin Proust, “le plus intéressant du groupe préraphaélite, a traduit . . . la ballade de Tennyson . . . avec une puissance extraordinaire; la vigueur du dessin, la force des colorations, la profondeur des expressions, l’harmonie de l’ensemble donnent à cette toile, toute imprégnée d’un vigoureux amour pour Carpaccio et pour Mantegna, un attrait fort et durable.”³⁸

Much had been done to educate French audiences during the intervening years. Joseph Comyns Carr, one of the Grosvenor’s deputy directors and a close friend of Burne-Jones, had gone out of his way to publicize his work in a series of articles on contemporary British painting which he wrote during the decade 1875–85 in his capacity as London correspondent of the magazine *L’Art*.³⁹ The critic Ernest Chesneau, who was soliciting information from Burne-Jones in October 1882,⁴⁰ discussed him in his book *Artistes anglais contemporains*, published the same year;⁴¹ another critic, Édouard Rod, who had come to England and met the artist in person, published two important articles on the Pre-Raphaelites in the *Gazette des Beaux-Arts* in 1887.

The success of *King Cophetua* led to many requests that Burne-Jones exhibit other works in Paris. Just as he preferred the Grosvenor and New Gallery to the Royal Academy in London, so he supported not the official Salon in the Champs-Élysées but the more liberal Salon of the Société Nationale des Beaux-Arts in the Champ de Mars, showing there in 1892, 1893, 1895, and 1896. He corresponded with Puvis de Chavannes, its co-founder and moving spirit, who tried in 1891 to secure *The Wheel of Fortune* (cat. no. 52). Georgie states in the *Memorials* that the picture was exhibited in Paris,⁴² but

this was not the case. The following year, however, Burne-Jones showed a group of twelve drawings, three of which, all studies for *Fortune*, he presented to the Luxembourg, receiving by way of thanks a handsome Sèvres vase bearing his initials. *Fortune*’s connection with France was renewed when it was acquired from Balfour’s brother by the Vicomte de Noailles in 1932, and it is fitting that it should now have a permanent home in the Musée d’Orsay.

In 1893 Burne-Jones’s exhibits at the Salon included *The Depths of the Sea* (cat. no. 119) and the final version of *Perseus and the Graiae* (cat. no. 89), while in 1895 he again showed *Love among the Ruins*. The picture was severely damaged in a photographer’s studio, causing him to paint another version in oil.⁴³ Meanwhile, a flood of articles and reviews was appearing in a wide variety of journals,⁴⁴ providing general information, critical assessments, and comments on pictures to be seen in Paris and on exhibition in London. Outstanding were the articles published by Paul Leprieux in the *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*. The first, in November 1892, prepared with the help of Fairfax Murray, was devoted to Burne-Jones’s decorative work, while others reviewed his retrospective exhibition at the New Gallery that winter and his contributions to the Salon du Champ de Mars the following year. Another long and laudatory article, by Jean Lahor, comparing Burne-Jones to Moreau, appeared in the *Revue de Paris* in September 1894, while Robert de la Sizeranne discussed him at length in his popular book *La Peinture anglaise contemporaine*, published in 1895 and based on articles which had recently appeared in the *Revue des Deux Mondes*. Not least was the role of the English magazine *The Studio*, which had a large European readership. Launched in 1893, it often featured the work of Burne-Jones, particularly his drawings and decorative designs. Nor, of course, were these just written descriptions. All the more substantial articles were well illustrated, while Hollier’s photographs and the reproductive engravings (many, as we saw, by French artists) were well known on the Continent. The two Frenchwomen who amused Lady Battersea by asking the size of her engraving of *The Golden Stairs* were typical of a public that was thoroughly familiar with every aspect of the artist’s work. Inevitably, reproductions of his paintings adorn the walls of characters in Proust.⁴⁵

Burne-Jones was admired in Paris until the turn of the century and beyond. Long obituary notices appeared at his death, and two pictures, *The Dream of Lancelot* (cat. no. 162) and *The Prioress’s Tale* (cat. no. 43), were seen at the Exposition Universelle of 1900. But by the mid-1890s his star was already waning. Critics who favored the Impressionists accused him of archaizing, and there was a polarization of those for and against. In 1895 the Baronne Deslandes came to London to sit to him for her portrait (fig. 31). A writer herself, publishing

romances under the pseudonym Ossit, she was a well-known figure in sophisticated literary and Symbolist circles, numbering Oscar Wilde and Maurice Barrès among her friends. She was a passionate admirer of Burne-Jones, and he rose to the occasion by painting her with a crystal ball in her lap and sprays of laurel, symbol of poetical inspiration and prophecy, behind her head. Alas, the result, in his most mannered late style, was severely criticized when it was shown at the Champ de Mars in 1896, and he never exhibited in Paris again during his lifetime. Nonetheless, the picture made a fitting climax to a remarkable episode in Anglo-French artistic relations. Burne-Jones was by no means alone in enjoying popularity in Paris during this period. Watts, who is actually mentioned in Huysmans's famous decadent novel *À Rebours* (1884), was also highly acclaimed, as were Rossetti and other Pre-Raphaelites. But it was Burne-Jones who caught the public imagination, becoming, as Arsène Alexandre wrote, "l'objet d'enthousiasmes presque sans pareils" and inspiring "aux journalistes et à ses propres confrères des admirations dithyrambiques."⁴⁶ To find Paris showing comparable excitement over British painting one has to go back to the sensation caused by the early Pre-Raphaelites at the Exposition Universelle of 1855, if not to John Constable's triumph at the Salon of 1824.

France was not the only European country in which Burne-Jones was acclaimed. His reputation also stood high in Belgium, where his staunchest advocate was the artist Fernand Khnopff (1858–1921; fig. 95). An Anglophile who exhibited regularly in London and acted as the *Studio's* Brussels correspondent, Khnopff came to know Burne-Jones quite well. They exchanged drawings,⁴⁷ and when Burne-Jones died, Khnopff wrote his obituary notice for the *Magazine of Art*. Another Belgian admirer was the painter Jean Delville (1867–1921), who was to teach art at Glasgow in the 1900s. In 1888 Burne-Jones was invited to exhibit with Les XX, the avant-garde art group in Brussels, and although he refused, pleading pressure of work, photographs of paintings by himself and Rossetti were shown in the Belgian capital at the Galerie Dumont two years later. In fact, by the 1890s knowledge of Burne-Jones was a pan-European phenomenon. In Germany the Saint George series (cat. nos. 31, 33, 34) was awarded a gold medal at the Munich International Exhibition of 1897. The Grand Duke of Hesse made a painting of the same saint the centerpiece of his Art Nouveau room at Darmstadt (cat. no. 86), and a monograph on the artist by Otto von Schleinitz appeared in the *Künstler-Monographien* series in 1901. In Barcelona reproductions of Burne-Jones's work attracted the attention of the young Picasso. He later claimed that he was on his way to London to see the paintings themselves when he found himself detained in Paris, but this may be taken with a pinch of salt.⁴⁸ Even in Russia Burne-Jones was not unknown. A

painting of Saint George for an unnamed Russian patron appears in his work record for 1897.

So much admiration inevitably resulted in artistic influence. Burne-Jones's serpentine line is generally considered to have made a major contribution to the development of international Art Nouveau. His influence has been detected in the work of Gustave Moreau, who we know had a framed reproduction of *The Days of Creation* (fig. 79), obtained for him from the artist by a mutual friend;⁴⁹ and it is not hard to trace his impact on younger French Symbolist painters—Edmond Aman-Jean, Armand Point, Henri le Sidaner, Lucien Lévy-Dhurmer, Maurice Denis, Edgard Maxence. Elsewhere in Europe artists such as Ferdinand Hodler, Gustav Klimt, and Jan Toorop (who went to England in 1884 and met William Morris) betray various debts to the Pre-Raphaelites, in which an awareness of Burne-Jones no doubt played its part. But the artist who most obviously and consistently echoed him anywhere in Europe (and it is significant that he had close links with the Parisian art world) was Khnopff. Even at the time his picture *Memories* of 1889 (fig. 39) was described as "a pillage of Burne-Jones,"⁵⁰ and their work has much in common, especially in terms of facial types and the mood of intense stillness that each liked to evoke. The suggestion has even been made that Khnopff influenced Burne-Jones.⁵¹

The question of Burne-Jones's reputation and artistic influence abroad is really part of a more general issue, his role in the international Symbolist movement. There is no doubt that those who wrote about him in Paris and elsewhere saw him as a Symbolist, but in England the matter was never quite so clear. London did not produce (and the omission says much about British art, perhaps about the British character) anything remotely comparable to the Symbolist manifesto that Jean Moréas published in the Parisian newspaper *Le Figaro* in September 1886. Even a corpus of self-consciously Symbolist literature, such as existed in France and the movement's other capital, Brussels, was lacking. This meant not only that the artists were blissfully unaware of the sort of theoretical concepts that Moréas attempted to formulate, but that historically the British have been slow to attach the Symbolist label to their late-nineteenth-century literary painters. It was not in fact until last autumn (1997) that an exhibition at the Tate Gallery attempted to place Rossetti, Burne-Jones, Watts, and others in this context, convincingly demonstrating that they belong to the movement if this is perceived in fairly comprehensive terms.⁵² Nothing may have been so defined or articulated in England as it was abroad, but ideals were remarkably similar and there was a good deal of cross-fertilization with developments in Europe.

We have seen that the Pre-Raphaelites were a major source for the international movement, and that Burne-Jones was a

vital link in the tradition. His subjects, mood, and ideal of female beauty were all to be picked up and assimilated. He himself clearly had considerable sympathy with what he saw happening abroad, responding positively to most of the overtures and expressing the hope that “a splendid school of painting [would] yet . . . come out of France.”⁵³ He was probably thinking especially of Puvis de Chavannes, who, he told G. F. Watts, had “lifted the same banner” as themselves.⁵⁴

In the light of what we have seen of his development, we can discern certain strands within his contribution. It is fascinating, for instance, to find Ruskin’s theories of allegory and symbolism, evolved some forty years earlier in defense of Turner, seeping into the movement through the medium of Burne-Jones’s paintings. Nor is this as tortuous as it might appear. Carlyle, who so influenced Ruskin and was associated with him in shaping Burne-Jones’s mind at its most formative period, had a direct and profound impact on Symbolism. *Sartor Resartus* (1833–34), of which a French translation appeared in installments in the *Mercur de France* in 1896, has been described as a “cult book” for the movement. It went far in defining what was meant by the very term “symbol,” while another book, *Past and Present*, published in 1843 and eagerly read by Burne-Jones and his contemporaries at Oxford, gave shape to that quintessential Symbolist image, the inscrutable sphinx.⁵⁵ To widen the area of reference, there is a parallel between the contribution of Romanticism to Burne-Jones’s artistic makeup—represented by Ruskin, Carlyle, and their antecedents, but also by Ossian, Scott, Byron, Meinhold, and others who played on his early imagination—and the French Symbolists’ inheritance of *their* Romantic tradition. The descent of Moreau and Redon from Delacroix is the example that leaps to mind.

But the Symbolist element in Burne-Jones did not stem only from his Ruskinian background. One of the strengths of the Tate exhibition was to show how much British Symbolism owed to Aestheticism. As Andrew Wilton wrote in the catalogue, the earlier movement “literally cleared the way for Symbolism” by introducing ideas that it was to modify and develop—art’s freedom from conventional subject matter, the importance of formal perfection, the analogy with music, and so on. Indeed, Wilton is clearly right when he stresses that for all its concern with formal values, Aestheticism as it emerges in the pages of Swinburne and Pater has already crossed any line of theoretical division. A self-conscious and subjective description by Swinburne of a drawing by some Florentine master is “a minor work of Decadent art in its own right,” and Pater’s famous account of the *Mona Lisa*, comparing her to “the Vampire, [who] has been dead many times, and learned the secrets of the grave,” by evoking “a mysterious and dangerous female presence in an archaic landscape,” moves “into

a world of myth and dream [that] is clearly Symbolist.”⁵⁶ Burne-Jones’s attempt to give visual form to this type of image was probably his greatest contribution to Symbolism, certainly abroad. But it was no more than the end of a cycle. Swinburne and Pater both owed an enormous debt to French literature, while Gautier had given the Aesthetes their catchphrase: “Art for art’s sake.”

None of this, of course, makes Burne-Jones the archetypal Symbolist. On the contrary, there were large and significant areas of the movement’s territory that were quite outside his range. When all is said about his “modern” concern with anxiety and sexual tension, all allowances made for the mystery embodied in his faces, he has no real place in the cult of decadence associated with Baudelaire, Huysmans, and Swinburne. Tongue in cheek, Henry James might describe the figure of Venus in *Laus Veneris* (cat. no. 63) as looking like a woman who has had “an ‘intimate’ acquaintance with life,” but in reality the picture is all chaste innocence beside Swinburne’s literary version, let alone its Baudelairean antecedents. Still less does Burne-Jones have any truck with the satanism that Huysmans made fashionable in his second novel, *Là-bas* (1891). Even the motif of the femme fatale that Symbolism so eagerly embraced plays a limited role in his world. Sidonia von Bork (cat. no. 12), Morgan le Fay (fig. 55), Nimuë (cat. nos. 15, 42), and Circe (fig. 24) are the only obvious examples. The heroine of *Laus Veneris* poses little real threat to the knights who peep in at her window, and Phyllis is forgiving rather than ensnaring her lover (cat. nos. 48, 114).

In fact, Burne-Jones seems a model of serenity, sanity, and balance beside many of his Continental counterparts. It is significant that when the self-styled Joséphin (Sâr) Péladan (1858–1918), one of the most bizarre and exotic flowers in the Symbolist hothouse, invited him to contribute to the first exhibition at his Salon de la Rose + Croix in 1892, he refused on the grounds that the enterprise sounded “silly” and “high falutin.”⁵⁷ Artistic temperament, Ruskin’s insistence on “grace and tranquillity,” the narrative instinct that never deserted him (an obituarist noted that his work shows no “tortured symbolism; the story was simply told”⁵⁸)—all these played their part. Or perhaps it was more a matter of age and belonging to an older tradition. Khnopff, Redon, and other “pure” Symbolists were all younger men, while Puvis de Chavannes, the French artist Burne-Jones particularly admired and to whom the French often compared him, Sizeranne calling Puvis “le Burne-Jones français,”⁵⁹ was nine years his senior. In fact, Puvis is comparable to Burne-Jones not only in terms of his concession to narrative but in his debt to such artists as Giotto and Piero della Francesca, the large scale of his paintings (many of them destined for the public buildings that Burne-Jones so longed to decorate), and their air of nobility, peace,

and restraint. He too, not surprisingly, was highly suspicious of the Rose + Croix. It has even been argued that he was not really a Symbolist at all,⁶⁰ and purists might say the same of Burne-Jones. There is certainly a sense in which he transcends Symbolism, and here Puvis is not the only comparison; the same is true of other major artists who have a place under the Symbolist umbrella—Böcklin, Gauguin, or Munch.

For all this, Burne-Jones held certain basic views on art and the role of the artist that were typically Symbolist. His concern with the spiritual dimension; his hatred of materialism, commercialism, and the modern world; his unashamed elitism and readiness to erect an ivory tower for himself and other sensitive souls—all these correspond to key Symbolist principles. It is true that no Symbolist with the remotest inclination to model himself on Huysmans's hero des Esseintes would have felt the corrective need, as he did, to paint for "common people"; the more exclusive the better was the orthodox attitude. But the Symbolist concept of the artist as a priest or magus was one that he had been prepared to countenance, at least in early life, when Ruskin and Carlyle were helping him to make the transition from the altar to the painter's studio.

Perhaps his most Symbolist trait is his love of ambiguity. Symbolism abounds in enigmas, hybrids, and chimeras, and it was Stéphane Mallarmé himself who said that "to name an object is to suppress three-quarters of the enjoyment to be gained from a poem, . . . suggestion, that is the dream."⁶¹ Burne-Jones resisted any pressure to explain his pictures too precisely. "When [they were] finished," wrote Georgie, "he wanted everyone to see in [them] what they could for themselves. He was often amused by the anxiety people had to be told what they ought to think about [them] as well as by their determination to find a deep meaning in every line he drew."⁶² Still less did he approve of "didactic pictures," feeling that "words [were] the most fitting medium for pointing any special moral."⁶³ When told that a picture at the New Gallery was "a warning against lust," he remarked that such an idea would be "much better left alone." But he admitted that he "liked a little mystery in a picture, it sets people wondering and thinking."⁶⁴ Ultimately he believed that a picture should present a "mystery" because nothing less was a valid comment on life. "The burden of Michelangelo," he wrote, is that "all earthly things . . . are a Mystery." Phidias and other Greek sculptors had "got as far, possibly farther," in representing the human form, but "they nowhere express the mystery of life. That is later"⁶⁵—in Michelangelo and, by implication, in himself.

No one had a greater impact on Symbolism than Richard Wagner (1813–1883). His art was widely perceived as epitomizing its aspirations, and any attempt to place Burne-Jones in the movement must take account of their relationship. It was recognized at the time that he and Morris had an affinity

with the composer. The Tannhäuser legend had been treated by Wagner in his opera, by Burne-Jones in *Laus Veneris* (cat. no. 63), and by Morris in "The Hill of Venus," one of the stories in *The Earthly Paradise*. There were indeed specific connections—through Swinburne, whose poem on the same theme is included in *Poems and Ballads* (1866), and Baudelaire, who had written a pamphlet defending the opera when it was booed off the stage in Paris and had sent Swinburne a copy. The opera had also inspired a painting, *Scène de Tannhäuser* (1863–64; Los Angeles County Museum of Art), by Whistler's friend Fantin-Latour. Swinburne had seen the picture in the artist's studio in 1863, and it had subsequently been acquired by Alexander Ionides, whose family were keen Wagnerians. All this helps to explain the to-ing and fro-ing that occurred when the Wagners came to London in May 1877, staying with Chariclea Ionides, the youngest of the siblings, and her husband, Edward Dannreuther, who was one of the composer's most ardent advocates in England. Cosima Wagner expressed a wish to meet Morris, "as he treated the same subjects that her husband had treated in his music,"⁶⁶ and another mutual friend, George Eliot, brought her to The Grange, where she sat to Burne-Jones for a portrait drawing, later sending him her death mask of Beethoven as a token of her admiration. Burne-Jones never met Wagner himself, but they exchanged "polite messages," and he and Georgie attended some of the concerts that the composer was giving at the Albert Hall to raise money for an improved production of *The Ring* at Bayreuth. In fact, as Georgie records, Burne-Jones "did not, as a rule, love Wagner's music," but he had to admit, on hearing *Parsifal* in 1884, that the composer had evoked "the very sounds that were to be heard in the Sangraal Chapel," and, he added, "I ought to know."⁶⁷ In light of this it is not difficult to see other connections similar to that between *Tannhäuser* and *Laus Veneris*. The Holy Grail tapestries (cat. nos. 145–151) and *The Dream of Launcelot* (cat. no. 162) may be bracketed with *Parsifal*, and the unfinished *Tristram and Iseult* (1871–72; priv. coll.) with *Tristan und Isolde*. Here again Swinburne adds a significant third parallel. His epic poem *Tristram of Lyonesse* was published in 1882, and during its long gestation he had told Burne-Jones that he found himself "stimulated" by "your painting and Wagner's music."⁶⁸ Richard Jenkyns has made a more general but equally telling comparison, observing that in *Perseus and the Graiae* (cat. no. 89) "the weird sisters seem to be a trio of Norns escaped from Wagner's *Götterdämmerung*."⁶⁹

Knowledge of Burne-Jones was not, of course, confined to Europe. Morris had a number of clients in the New World and the colonies, and there were Burne-Jones windows in Calcutta by 1875, Norfolk Island by 1876, Montreal by 1885, Cape Town by 1890, Sydney by 1892. The colonial museums that were springing up in the late nineteenth century almost

as fast as their regional counterparts in England were slower to buy Burne-Jones than they were Leighton, Poynter, or Waterhouse, but the National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, acquired an important early drawing, the pen-and-ink *Ladies and Death* (fig. 58), formerly in the Boyce collection, in 1898.

A more detailed picture emerges when we turn to America, where Ruskin had enormous influence and Pre-Raphaelitism was a familiar phenomenon. Two men in particular were responsible: William James Stillman (1828–1901), who took up the coeditorship of the magazine *The Crayon* in 1855, and Charles Eliot Norton (fig. 96), who was to hold the post of Professor of the History of Art at Harvard from 1875 to 1898. Stillman became acquainted with Burne-Jones when, having abandoned art for diplomacy, moved to Europe, and married Marie Spartali, he sat for the head of Merlin in *The Beguiling of Merlin* (cat. no. 64). But the more important figure in this context is Norton. Already an ardent follower of Ruskin, whom he had recently met in Switzerland, Norton was introduced to Burne-Jones by the Brownings in 1856, and they remained on intimate terms until the artist's death forty-three years later. There is no doubt that Norton was in love with the whole Burne-Jones experience. "The Grange," he wrote, "was quite the most enchanted ground in London. I wish it might remain so forever in reality as it will in my imagination."⁷⁰ Whenever he was in England he would call on his hero, sometimes bringing American friends like James Russell Lowell to meet him. Meanwhile, in America he did everything he could to promote the artist's reputation, including lending pictures to the Pre-Raphaelite exhibition held in Philadelphia and New York in 1892. Indeed, Norton's advocacy of Ruskin and the Pre-Raphaelites was so wholehearted that it was almost counterproductive, causing some of his students to rebel.⁷¹

Morris supplied many windows to Burne-Jones's designs for churches in New York and Boston, the first in 1874 but the majority in the early 1880s.⁷² The most important was the east window in Henry Hobson Richardson's Trinity Church in Boston, installed in 1883 and representing David instructing Solomon about the building of the Temple. The artist himself rated the complex design highly. "This work," he wrote in his account book, "may be said to represent the culmination of my power"⁷³—though it has to be said that he made similar claims for other windows. The same year saw a display of Morris/Burne-Jones glass at the Boston Foreign Fair, while the heiress Catharine Lorillard Wolfe (1828–1887), later a benefactor of The Metropolitan Museum of Art, commissioned an impressive window featuring Norse gods and heroes for Vinland, the house at Newport, Rhode Island, that Robert Swain Peabody had designed for her as a summer retreat (fig. 97). Walter Crane was also involved in



Figure 96.
Charles Eliot
Norton (1827–
1908). From a
photograph in
Charles Eliot
Norton, *Letters*
(1913)

the house's decoration. Meanwhile, in 1881 Burne-Jones had embarked on the task of designing mosaics for Saint Paul's Within-the-Walls, G. E. Street's new church for the American community in Rome (fig. 98). Miss Wolfe, who knew the incumbent, Dr. Robert J. Nevin (1839–1906), was one of those who helped to finance the project.

Burne-Jones also had American buyers for his pictures. The earliest, apart from Norton, seems to have been William John Fitzgerald, a lawyer who had married the daughter of a wealthy New York merchant, Eli White. The couple had houses in New York and London, and in 1884 Burne-Jones painted a charming portrait of their daughter Caroline (fig. 99). Noted for her scholarly and literary interests (she was fluent in Sanskrit, an active member of the American Oriental Society, and a friend of Browning, to whom she dedicated a volume of poetry), Caroline married Lord Edmund Fitzmaurice, younger brother of the Marquess of Lansdowne, in 1889. Five years later the marriage was dissolved, and in 1901 she married the distinguished Italian explorer Filippo de Filippi, several of whose books she translated. She died in Rome in 1911, a well-known figure in local society.⁷⁴ Other buyers for Burne-Jones's paintings emerged in the 1890s. Samuel Bancroft, whose collection is still intact at Wilmington, acquired his first picture, *The Council Chamber* from the third Briar Rose series (cat. no. 56), in 1892, buying it via Fairfax Murray from Agnew's; and in 1896 *Hope* (cat. no. 163) was painted for Mrs. George Marston Whitin of Whitinsville, Massachusetts. "They are very pleased with it," Burne-Jones reported, but he was dismayed to hear that its owner planned to hang it without glass. "I like a picture so much better under glass, it is like a kind of ethereal varnish."⁷⁵

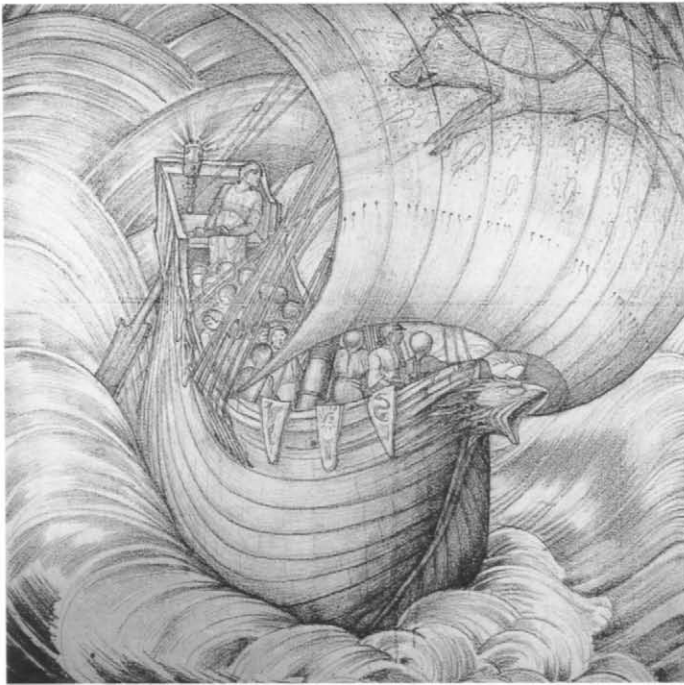


Figure 97. Edward Burne-Jones, *The Voyage to Vinland the Good*, 1883–84. Pencil, 30 $\frac{3}{8}$ x 30 $\frac{1}{2}$ in. (77.2 x 77.5 cm). Cartoon for stained glass at Vinland, Newport, Rhode Island. Carlisle Art Gallery

The full story of Burne-Jones's impact on American art and taste has yet to be written. It is often said that he influenced such late-nineteenth-century artists as Elihu Vedder, Thomas Wilmer Dewing, John La Farge, and Edwin Austin Abbey. La Farge met him when he went to London in 1873, and was later in charge of the decoration of Trinity Church, to which, as we have seen, Burne-Jones contributed. Abbey was so impressed when he saw the Briar Rose paintings in 1896 that he decided to paint a comparable scheme himself.⁷⁶ John Singer Sargent, who was with Abbey on this revelatory occasion, was also a great admirer of Burne-Jones, as well as a friend with many friends in common. They shared patrons, too, including Sir George and Lady Lewis, the Wyndham family, and Mrs. Whitin of Whitinsville, a name that tickled Sargent greatly.⁷⁷ Superficially the artists' styles could not have been more dissimilar, and indeed Burne-Jones could never reconcile himself to Sargent's lack of "finish." But Sargent's decision later in life to abandon portraiture for mural painting reflects his long-standing respect for the Pre-Raphaelites; and it is impossible to believe that his painting *Perseus Slaying Medusa*, one of the canvases he executed for the staircase of the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, in the early 1920s, does not echo the same subject among Burne-Jones's Perseus series (cat. nos. 92, 93).⁷⁸

Attention has also been focused on the work carried out by Francis Lathrop when he returned to New York having been one of Burne-Jones's assistants in the early 1870s.⁷⁹ Lathrop



Figure 98. George Edmund Street (1824–1881). Saint Paul's Within-the-Walls, Via Nazionale, Rome, 1872–76. Photograph ca. 1876

seems to have specialized in painting ceilings in grand New York houses, including the Villard Houses (1884) on Madison Avenue and Fiftieth Street, and he was involved in the production of Clarence Cook's popular and influential book *The House Beautiful* (1878). He worked also as a furniture painter for Daniel Cottier (1838–1891), the enterprising Scottish decorative artist, influenced by William Morris and his circle, who set up business in New York in 1873 and did much to promote Aesthetic values among its more prosperous and artistically minded citizens. Cottier, who played an even greater part in Cook's publication, including designing its cover, remained in close touch with England, importing Morris fabrics and wallpapers and adapting the furniture designs of E. W. Godwin. Twice he found himself contributing to the same projects as Burne-Jones. He supplied Miss Wolfe with furniture for Vinland, and executed four memorial windows for Trinity Church, Boston.

It is perhaps worth recalling that Harry Macdonald, Georgie's elder brother and Burne-Jones's companion at school and at Oxford, emigrated to New York in 1858 and remained there (apart from a visit to England in 1869–70, when he spent some time at The Grange) until his death in 1891. He seems to have taken no interest in art and was a poor correspondent, but at least he represented a permanent link with New York. It is also interesting to note that both the United States Ambassador and the Secretary to the American Embassy in London were among those who attended Burne-

Jones's memorial service in Westminster Abbey. This can only indicate the esteem in which he was held on the other side of the Atlantic.

The mosaics for the American Church in Rome were, as Richard Dormant reminds us, the most extensive ecclesiastical decoration to be carried out in the city in the late nineteenth century.⁸⁰ They were also by far the most extensive decorative project that Burne-Jones had ever undertaken. Endless labor was involved in preparing the enormous cartoons and matching them up with the tesserae, or squares of colored glass, with which he was supplied by the mosaic makers, the Venezia-Murano Company in Venice. The fact that the work was being designed so far away from its place of manufacture also led to much frustration. The first attempt was a failure, and Burne-Jones was himself unable—or unwilling—to go out and supervise. But he sent Rooke and Dr. Nevin to Venice, and eventually success was achieved. He persevered partly because this was almost the only opportunity he had to fulfill his ambition of decorating “choirs and places where they sing,” and partly out of reverence for the mosaics he had seen in Venice and Torcello in 1862 and in Ravenna in 1873. Indeed, these and the fact that Street's building was Romanesque in style gave his designs their neo-Byzantine character. He never saw the results in situ or the task completed, Rooke finishing it from his sketch designs after his death.

Decorative work of all kinds continued to occupy Burne-Jones during these later years. Although Morris would often reuse his earlier designs for stained glass—many times if they were popular—new cartoons were produced throughout the 1880s and 1890s. Their collaboration in this field culminated in the four enormous windows in Birmingham Cathedral, the building in which Burne-Jones's parents had been married and he himself had been baptized. Indeed, these are traditionally considered to be the friends' ultimate achievement in stained glass, although today they are sometimes criticized for their extreme pictorialism and a supposed lack of harmony with their Baroque setting.

During the 1880s Morris took up tapestry making, and again Burne-Jones supplied the more important designs involving figures. There were the usual correspondences with other types of work; tapestry designs were developed from stained glass or adapted for easel paintings. Despite their distrust of industrial techniques, the friends were not averse to using photography in making the huge cartoons necessary for some of the tapestries and late stained-glass windows. Once fixed in a small drawing, the composition would be enlarged photographically and the result worked over by Burne-Jones to refine details.

But increasingly Burne-Jones's decorative work fell outside the scope of Morris's activity. The American Church was only

one example. In the late 1880s there was a plan to design mosaics for another Street church, Saint John's, Torquay. This project fell through for lack of funds, but with Rooke's help Burne-Jones produced two large paintings on canvas as a substitute (Carnegie Museum of Art, Pittsburgh). Offered a similar and much larger commission in 1891 for Saint Paul's Cathedral, London, he turned it down because he so disliked the building. This must be regarded as a misfortune, as the mosaics that William Blake Richmond provided instead, though competent, lack the imagination and character that Burne-Jones would have brought to the scheme.

Meanwhile, many smaller tasks claimed his attention. With the help of the firm of John Broadwood and Sons he attempted to re-form the Victorian grand piano, replacing its vulgar curves and bulges with a simpler, more chaste design based on the harpsichord (cat. no. 125). For some years from 1879 on he found himself producing designs for sculptural reliefs, the nearest to “taking to sculpture” he was to come. Some, commissioned by George Howard, were carried out in bronze by Sir Joseph Edgar Boehm, Sculptor in Ordinary to Queen Victoria (cat. nos. 122, 132). Others were realized in gesso. A rectangular design of the Hesperides was repeated for the front of a *cassone* and as an overmantel for the Lewises' country “cottage” at Walton-on-Thames.⁸¹ But his most ambitious work in this medium was a large memorial to Laura Lyttelton (fig. 100), a much-loved young “Soul” who died in childbirth in 1886. Representing a peacock seated on a laurel bush bursting from a tomb, a symbol of resurrection, it was one of three funerary monuments that he designed about this



Figure 99. Edward Burne-Jones, *Caroline Fitzgerald*, 1884. Oil on canvas, 32½ x 20½ in. (82.9 x 52.1 cm). Art Gallery of Ontario, Toronto, on extended loan from the Governing Council of the University of Toronto

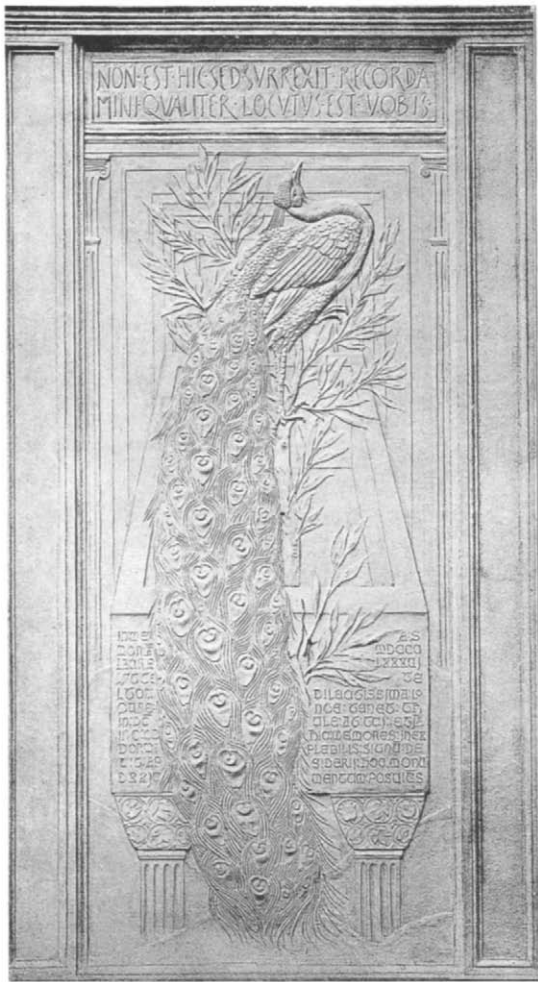


Figure 100. Edward Burne-Jones, *Memorial to Laura Lyttelton*, 1886. Gesso relief, 47 x 32¼ in. (119.5 x 82 cm). Victoria and Albert Museum, London

time. In 1885 he devised a simple headstone to mark William Graham's grave in the Glasgow necropolis, and when Leyland died seven years later he fashioned for him a handsome sarcophagus in Brompton cemetery. Even in death these two munificent patrons maintained their characteristic styles with his assistance.

But most of his decorative designs were still consecrated to the living. In 1894 he conceived another work to be carried out in bronze relief, the seal of the newly instituted University of Wales. Many designs were made for embroidery (cat. no. 130), some of them commissioned by the Royal School of Art Needlework, founded in 1872; and some interesting experiments in jewelry design included pieces made by the well-known Piccadilly firm of Giuliano (cat. no. 137) and one of the gold crosses that Ruskin presented each year to the May Queen at Whitelands Training College for Girls in Chelsea (cat. no. 136). Among other objects that either exist or for which designs are known or recorded were a clavichord, a cradle, a jewel box, bookcovers, a lady's fan, and embroidered shoes, even the chandeliers and wooden seats in his "garden" studio. His versatility seemed all-embracing, and no one

expressed better the Pre-Raphaelite ideal of art as a way of life. Many of his designs were shown in the exhibitions held at the New Gallery by the Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society, which was launched in 1888 to define and promote this philosophy.

Burne-Jones's enormous and varied output could not have been achieved without intense application. "The work that went on at home," Philip recalled, "was incessant, and I never remember seeing my father idle. He breakfasted punctually at eight o'clock, and was always in his studio by nine—where he worked uninterruptedly till one o'clock. A short hour was allowed for luncheon, after which he returned to work for as long as the light lasted. . . . Sometimes he allowed himself a short breathing-space, when he would leave the studio and pay brief visits to various members of his family, or respond to the civilities of a caller, but without ever relinquishing his palette and brushes, to which he seemed to cling as a symbol of safety."⁸² Even the notorious "pea soupers" that afflicted Victorian London do not seem to have deterred him. "I generally go and see Burne-Jones when there's a fog," the actress Ellen Terry told George Bernard Shaw in October 1896. "He looks so angelic, painting away there by candlelight."⁸³

And yet, on top of all his studio work, Burne-Jones found time for another, "unofficial" artistic activity. His addiction to making humorous drawings is not difficult to explain. It was another recourse for that restless pencil and a means of expressing the puckish side of his personality that found no place in his painting. It was also an outlet not only for all that was extraneous to the paintings of that intense "looking" at life which Henry James had noted but for a particular *kind* of observation. Graham Robertson is once again perceptive. "I . . . noticed very soon when walking with him," he wrote,

that wonderfully quick as he was to observe and note passing events of a sad or comic or quaint character, all such material as would be useful to the novelist or the poet, he saw nothing from the purely pictorial point of view.

Albert Moore [under whom Robertson had studied] would come in from a walk full of almost inarticulate delight at the memory of black winter trees fringing the jade-green Serpentine, or of a couple of open oysters lying on a bit of blue paper or of a flower-girl's basket of primroses seen through grey mist on a rainy morning. Burne-Jones would have woven a romance or told an amusing tale about the flower girl, but would not have noticed her primroses, the combination of the silvery oysters and the blue paper would not for a moment have struck him as beautiful; he had not the painter's eye.⁸⁴

Many of the drawings were made for children (fig. 101)—Philip and Margaret, Katie Lewis (cat. no. 118), Margaret's



Figure 101. Edward Burne-Jones. *Pig and Piglets*, 1880s. Pen and ink, $5\frac{3}{8} \times 7\frac{1}{8}$ in. (13.5 x 18.2 cm). British Museum, London

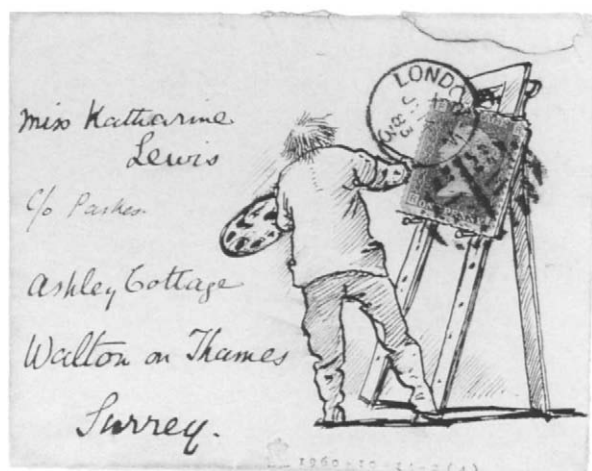


Figure 103. Edward Burne-Jones. Envelope addressed to Katie Lewis, 1883. Pen and ink, $3\frac{3}{4} \times 4\frac{3}{4}$ in. (9.5 x 12 cm). British Museum, London

children Denis and Angela (later the novelist Angela Thirkell), but perhaps above all, as Georgie noted, “the child that was always in himself.”⁸⁵ There were innocent nursery idylls populated by babies, pigs, cats, dogs, and birds, as well as such amiable mythical beasts as the “wallypug” and the “phlumbudge.” A whole series of drawings, a friend recalled, was devoted to “the life and habits of an animal called ‘The ‘Spression,’” a creature in itself undistinguished, “but his expression, now joyous, now melting, here deeply tragic, there raffish and rollicking, lent him a charm all his own. One particular drawing, ‘Stampede of Wild ‘Spressions in the Pampas,’ showed him in almost every mood and is a joy to remember.”⁸⁶ But not all these drawings were so cozy. For strong-minded children like Angela, there was a series entitled “The Horrors of Mountainous Lands.” “They nearly all had a hint of the nightmare about them, treating of the adventures of helpless midgets lost in vast lands of towering mountain peaks, fathomless abysses and trackless forests. One . . . showed an immense valley . . . smooth and polished like a basin into which a tiny insect-like man had slipped and



Figure 102. Edward Burne-Jones, *The Artist's Despair at the Cleaning of his ‘Augean’ Studio*, 1890s. Pen and ink, $8\frac{3}{4} \times 7$ in. (22.2 x 17.8 cm)

was sliding miserably down the side towards a dark hole which yawned at the foot. Beneath was the cheering inscription—‘Inside that hole there is a Thing.’”⁸⁷

Other drawings were aimed at a more adult audience. Some show Cockney models, eager for work but hopelessly unsuited to the Burne-Jones style. Others harp on that dreaded event, the cleaning of his “Augean” studio (fig. 102); Mrs. Mop goes vigorously about her work while the artist buries his head in despair. Burne-Jones’s election to the Athenaeum in 1879 prompted many sketches of bishops snoring the afternoon away under newspapers, and yet another series features Herr Dr. Schwumpff, the leading German authority on classical antiquities who epitomizes everything his creator disliked about art historians. “Every friend’s house,” wrote Georgie, had some of these drawings. “They filled up moments of waiting, moments of silence, or uncomfortable moments, bringing everyone together again in wonder at the swiftness of their creation, and laughter at their endless fun.”⁸⁸ One much-appreciated party trick was to embellish a friend’s visiting cards with imaginary portraits of their owners. Even the

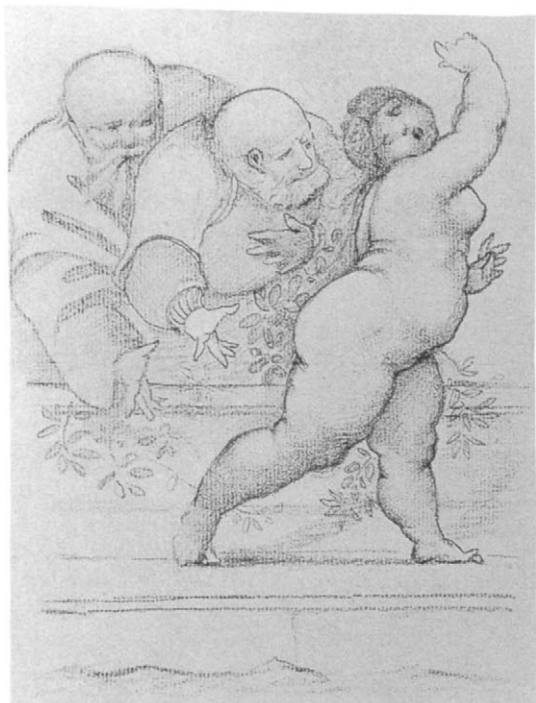


Figure 104. Edward Burne-Jones, *Susanna and the Elders*. Sketch "after Rubens," reproduced in Mrs. J. Comyns Carr's *Reminiscences* (1926)

envelopes of letters would be decorated, often with a sketch of the artist painting a portrait of the Queen represented by the stamp (fig. 103).

But there was more to these drawings than innocent "fun." Among the most common are the self-caricatures in which he fosters the myth that he is very old, pathetically thin, and hopelessly shabbily dressed. This image (sometimes given added piquancy by a related sketch of Philip as a smart young man about town) was essentially an amusing facade, but occasionally the mask would drop. There is a group of drawings in which he shows himself climbing through one of the Briar Rose paintings, eager to enter the enchanted world he has created only to find that there is nothing on the other side.⁸⁹ Equally complex are the drawings of Morris showing him as a fat plutocrat, an obsessive craftsman (cat. no. 173), or a glutton. Ostensibly these drawings are affectionate enough, but, like the complaints in the account book, they hint at frustrations in this seemingly perfect friendship.

However we interpret them, the drawings of Morris are an expression of what can only be described as Burne-Jones's preoccupation with obesity. Other drawings show sights in a Turkish bath, his tubby young friend the Tuan Muda of Sarawak going to bathe in a state of nature, and the Japanese sumo wrestlers he saw at Olympia, the exhibition center in West Kensington, not far from The Grange. He loved to invent ludicrously overblown parodies of his *bête noire* Rubens, often in terms of his own compositions (fig. 104), and

there is a wickedly irreverent reminiscence of Dürer's *Great Fortune*. By far the best known of these drawings, however, are the "fat ladies" (cat. no. 171), many of them dressed in their evening finery, large bustle on large bottom, others caught in a strong wind or some other revealing situation. Graham Robertson recalled "a projected series of imaginary Portraits of Prominent Women" that was "suppressed by the home authorities after the appearance of the first batch—the prominences were so unlooked-for and arresting."⁹⁰ It is said that Blanche, Lady Lindsay, who certainly put on weight in middle age, was the inspiration for some of these fantasies, but she was by no means alone. Hefty Wagnerian singers had a ghastly fascination for him, and he was riveted by Emma Frank, the American Tattooed Lady, visiting the Westminster Aquarium when she was exhibited there in 1894 to gaze in amazement at the reproduction of Leonardo's *Last Supper* emblazoned on her ample back and at the medley of Stars and Stripes, Union Jacks, and other incongruous insignia elsewhere on her anatomy.

Burne-Jones undoubtedly had his Rabelaisian side. He is said to have made ribald drawings on the theme of Swinburne's bizarre affair with the equestrienne Adah Menken, and there are hints of others still more scurrilous, done for intimate cronies. Clearly in these he was going well beyond the mere using up of superfluous visual data. We have entered the more troubled waters of psychological necessity as he seeks to express not just the humor excluded from his art but aspects of life at the very opposite extreme to his formal and spiritual ideal. Ruskin, who had laid such emphasis on that ideal and destroyed obscene drawings by Turner, was surely never allowed to see those of Burne-Jones.

1. The Grosvenor Gallery has received much scholarly attention in recent years. See especially the following: Virginia Surtees, *Coutts Lindsay, 1824–1913* (Norwich, 1993); Christopher Newall, *The Grosvenor Gallery Exhibitions* (Cambridge, 1995); and Yale Center for British Art 1996.
2. Usually said to be Santa Lucia, but this cannot have been the case; see Surtees, *Coutts Lindsay*, p. 200, n. 44.
3. *Times* (London), May 1, 1877, p. 10.
4. *Fortnightly Review*, June 1877, pp. 825–26.
5. James 1956, pp. 144–47.
6. Robertson 1931, pp. 74–76.
7. Ignace Jan Paderewski and Mary Lawton, *The Paderewski Memoirs* (London, 1939), pp. 185–87.
8. Sara Norton and M. A. DeWolfe Howe, eds., *Letters of Charles Eliot Norton* (London, 1913), vol. 2, p. 351.
9. Percy Lubbock, ed., *The Letters of Henry James* (London, 1920), vol. 1, p. 126.
10. Horner 1933, p. 26.
11. A typescript exists in the National Art Library in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, and a substantial portion was published in Lago 1981.
12. Lubbock, *Letters of Henry James*, vol. 1, pp. 315, 348.
13. John Bryson, ed., *Dante Gabriel Rossetti and Jane Morris: Their Correspondence* (Oxford, 1976), p. 173.
14. Zuzanna Shonfield, *The Precariously Privileged: A Professional Family in Victorian London* (Oxford, 1987), p. 118.

15. See Bryson, *Rossetti and Jane Morris*, p. 163.
16. Ruskin, *Works*, vol. 29 (1907), pp. 159–60.
17. See Linda Merrill, *A Pot of Paint: Aesthetics on Trial in Whistler v. Ruskin* (Washington, D.C., 1992). An article adapted from the book, “Conspiring against Whistler,” was published in *Tate: The Art Magazine* 4 (winter 1994), pp. 29–31.
18. James 1956, pp. 162, 164.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 205.
20. *Memorials*, vol. 2, pp. 127–28.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 139.
22. *Times* (London), May 1, 1884, p. 6.
23. Made by Barringer, Wallis, and Manners for Peck Frean & Co. (museum number M.680-1983).
24. *Athenaeum*, no. 2741 (May 8, 1880), p. 605.
25. Reproduced (from Hollyer photographs) in Wood 1907, pls. 30, 45, respectively. The study for *The Masque of Cupid* is in the City Museum and Art Gallery, Plymouth, while the location of the head of Paderewski is unknown.
26. Constance Battersca, *Reminiscences* (London, 1922), p. 312.
27. Ruskin, *Works*, vol. 33 (1908), p. 296.
28. *Memorials*, vol. 2, p. 234.
29. *Ibid.*, p. 175.
30. Ruskin, *Works*, vol. 4 (1903), p. 253.
31. Letter in the Pierpont Morgan Library, New York, quoted in Joan Abse, *John Ruskin: The Passionate Moralists* (London, 1980), p. 304.
32. *Athenaeum*, April 30, 1868, p. 618; *Times* (London), April 29, 1867, p. 6; Harry Quilter, *Preferences in Art, Life, and Literature* (London, 1892), p. 76.
33. Burne-Jones 1917, p. 34.
34. *Fortnightly Review*, November 1869, p. 507.
35. Isabel McAlister, *Alfred Gilbert* (London, 1929), p. 147.
36. For Burne-Jones’s influence on the New Sculpture, see Christian 1991, pp. 85–90.
37. *Memorials*, vol. 2, p. 16.
38. “Burne-Jones, the most interesting of the Pre-Raphaelites, has translated Tennyson’s ballad with extraordinary force; the vigour of the drawing, the strength of the colour scheme, the depth of the expressions, and the harmony of the general effect, give to this canvas, suffused with the artist’s ardent admiration for Carpaccio and Mantegna, a powerful and enduring charm” (Antonin Proust, *Exposition Universelle de 1889* [Paris, 1889], p. 603, quoted in Allemand-Cosneau 1992, p. 71). This article is a crucial source for the subject of Burne-Jones’s reputation in France. For an earlier account, see Jacques Lethève, “La Connaissance des peintres préraphaélites anglais en France (1855–1900),” *Gazette des Beaux-Arts*, ser. 6, 53 (1959), pp. 315–28.
39. See Barbara Bryant, “G. F. Watts at the Grosvenor Gallery,” in Yale Center for British Art 1996, pp. 117–18.
40. Burne-Jones’s reply to Chesneau’s inquiries, dated October 13, 1882, is in the British Library, London (Add. MS 36747, folio 63).
41. This is the book cited by Allemand-Cosneau (1992, p. 70), but according to other sources the book by Chesneau which spread knowledge of Burne-Jones in France was *La Peinture en Angleterre* (1885). To confuse matters further, the British Library catalogue lists a book by Chesneau entitled *La Peinture anglaise* (1882), of which an English translation with a preface by Ruskin appeared in 1885. Further research may show that in fact these are all variants of the same work.
42. *Memorials*, vol. 2, p. 225.
43. See *ibid.*, pp. 237–38. The later version, in the Bearsted Collection, is on loan to Wightwick Manor, Wolverhampton (National Trust).
44. For some of them, see Allemand-Cosneau 1992, p. 69.
45. See *ibid.*, p. 77, n. 46.
46. “The object of unparalleled enthusiasm” and inspiring “in both journalists and his fellow artists the most laudatory admiration” (*Le Figaro*, June 19, 1898, quoted in Allemand-Cosneau 1992, p. 69).
47. See Tate Gallery 1997–98, nos. 96, 108.
48. See John Richardson, *A Life of Picasso*, vol. 1, 1881–1906 (London, 1991), p. 159.
49. See Allemand-Cosneau 1992, pp. 71–72.
50. “M,” “7ème Exposition annuelle des XX,” *Le Journal de Charleroi*, January 30, 1890, quoted in MaryAnne Stevens, “Symbolism—A French Monopoly?” in Tate Gallery 1997–98, p. 58.
51. See Francine-Claire Legrand, “Fernand Khnopff—Perfect Symbolist,” *Apollo* 85 (April 1967), p. 283.
52. Tate Gallery 1997–98.
53. *Memorials*, vol. 2, p. 225.
54. Harrison and Waters 1973, p. 177.
55. See Tate Gallery 1997–98, pp. 29–31.
56. *Ibid.*, pp. 17, 24.
57. Letter to G. F. Watts, quoted in Harrison and Waters 1973, pp. 174–77.
58. *Times* (London), June 18, 1898, p. 13.
59. Robert de la Sizeranne, *La Peinture anglaise contemporaine* (Paris, 1895), pp. 6–7.
60. Richard J. Wattenmaker, *Puvis de Chavannes and the Modern Tradition* (exh. cat., Toronto: Art Gallery of Ontario, 1975), pp. 2–4.
61. Quoted in J. Huret, *Enquête sur l’évolution littéraire* (Paris, 1981), p. 60, according to MaryAnne Stevens in Tate Gallery 1997–98, p. 290, n. 20.
62. *Memorials*, vol. 1, p. 297.
63. *Ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 297.
64. T. M. Rooke, notes, p. 196, typescript, National Art Library, Victoria and Albert Museum, London.
65. *Memorials*, vol. 2, pp. 262–63.
66. Luke Ionides, *Memories*, facsimile ed., with an afterword by Julia Ionides (Ludlow, 1996), p. 22.
67. *Memorials*, vol. 2, p. 43.
68. Quoted in Philip Henderson, *Swinburne: The Portrait of a Poet* (London, 1974), pp. 154–55.
69. Richard Jenkyns, *Dignity and Decadence: Victorian Art and the Classical Inheritance* (London, 1991), p. 267.
70. Norton and Howe, *Letters of Charles Eliot Norton*, vol. 2, p. 427.
71. See Susan P. Casteras, *English Pre-Raphaelitism and Its Reception in America in the Nineteenth Century* (London and Toronto, 1990), pp. 28, 192, n. 37.
72. The Vanderpoel memorial window in Trinity Church, Saugerties-on-Hudson, New York. See Sewter 1974–75, vol. 1, pl. 478, vol. 2, pp. 225–26.
73. Quoted in *ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 224.
74. Caroline FitzGerald’s history until her divorce in 1894 is described in detail by Douglas Schoenherr in his entry for her portrait by Burne-Jones in Art Gallery of Ontario 1993–94, pp. 101–3, no. 13:2. For information about her subsequent career I am indebted to Alastair Laing.
75. *Memorials*, vol. 2, p. 306.
76. See *Edwin Austin Abbey (1852–1911)* (exh. cat., New Haven: Yale University Art Gallery; Philadelphia: Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts; Albany: Albany Institute of History and Art, 1973–74), p. 47, under no. 10.
77. See Robertson 1931, p. 234. Writing many years after the event, Robertson recalled the name as “Mrs Whiting of Whittingsville, Mass.,” but there is no doubt to whom he is referring.
78. Reproduced in Carter Ratcliff, *John Singer Sargent* (New York, 1986), p. 152, pl. 229.
79. See *In Pursuit of Beauty: Americans and the Aesthetic Movement* (exh. cat., New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1986–87), pp. 133, 134, 137, 480. Lathrop was a nephew of Nathaniel Hawthorne and possibly a brother of George Parsons Lathrop, who contributed an article on John La Farge to *Scribner’s Monthly* 21 (February 1881), pp. 503–16 (see *In Pursuit of Beauty*, pp. 447–48).
80. Dormant 1978, p. 73.
81. The overmantel, dated 1882, is in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London (Matthiesen Gallery 1991–92, p. 84, fig. 51). The *cassone*, dated 1888, is in the Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery.
82. Burne-Jones 1917, p. 31.
83. Christopher St. John, ed., *Ellen Terry and Bernard Shaw: A Correspondence* (London, 1931), pp. 112–13.
84. Robertson 1931, p. 82.
85. *Memorials*, vol. 2, p. 66.
86. Robertson 1931, p. 78.
87. *Ibid.*, pp. 77–78.
88. *Memorials*, vol. 1, p. 38.
89. Harrison and Waters 1973, p. 144, figs. 209–13.
90. Robertson 1925, p. vii.



84. **Le Chant d'Amour**

1868–77

Oil on canvas, 45 x 61 $\frac{3}{8}$ in. (114.3 x 155.9 cm)

Signed lower left: EBJ

PROVENANCE: Bought from the artist by William Graham; his sale, Christie's, April 3, 1886 (second day), lot 163, 3,150 gns. to Agnew's; Joseph Ruston, his sale, Christie's, May 21, 1898 (first day), lot 25, 3,200 gns. to Agnew's; Thomas Henry Ismay, and by descent to his widow; his trustees by 1933

EXHIBITED: Grosvenor Gallery, London, 1878, no. 108; New Gallery 1892–93, no. 40; New Gallery 1898–99, no. 109; Tate Gallery 1933, no. 9

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. The Alfred N. Punnett Endowment Fund, 1947 (47.26)

The large, final version of *Le Chant d'Amour*, a composition which had been in Burne-Jones's mind since the early 1860s, is one of his most hauntingly beautiful works. The musical theme, the emotional tension between the figures, the romantic landscape, and the evening light combine to create a mood of nostalgia and yearning which he often aims for but seldom captures in so intense a form. According to his auto-

graph work record (Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge), the picture was begun in 1868, worked on in 1872–73, and finally completed in 1877 after a month of uninterrupted work. It was exhibited at the Grosvenor Gallery the following year together with *Laus Veneris* (cat. no. 63), a picture very comparable in size, shape, and Venetian character. Indeed, they were regarded as pendants by William Graham, who commissioned them, and who originally hoped to link them with a painting entitled *Blind Love*, which Burne-Jones never completed.¹ Both works were enlarged oil versions of earlier watercolors which also belonged to Graham, who was particularly attached to these Venetian compositions, rich in atmosphere and glowing with color. If Graham liked a design well enough, he would often commission another version. In 1868, the year the present picture was started, he ordered a large oil version of another of Burne-Jones's early Giorgionesque idylls, *Green Summer* (fig. 63),² and he would later commission large versions of the Briar Rose paintings executed for him in 1871–72 (cat. nos. 55–58).

Graham was never to receive these canvases; they turned out to be too large even for his mansion in Grosvenor Place, crowded as this was with the Old Master and modern paint-

ings which he bought with such passionate commitment. Thus the large *Chant d'Amour* and *Laus Veneris*, together with the less Venetian *Days of Creation* (fig. 79), remained his largest Burne-Joneses, and in due course became the star lots among the thirty-three works by the artist which appeared for sale at Christie's following Graham's death in 1885. In fact, *Le Chant d'Amour* realized the highest price of the entire five-day sale, an impressive 3,150 guineas, although this was matched by *The Vale of Rest* (1858; Tate Gallery, London) by Millais, which had achieved the same figure on the previous day. It was the high prices realized by Burne-Jones's pictures at the Graham sale in 1886 and the Leyland sale six years later that finally established his reputation. Until then, a suspicion remained that his work was a minority taste or cult, and as such might be commercially limited. The Graham and Leyland sales proved that this was not the case.

This present exhibition seems to be the first that has included both the early watercolor version of *Le Chant d'Amour*, painted in 1865 (cat. no. 30), and the larger oil started three years later, and they make a fascinating comparison. The general concept remains remarkably similar. Figures, background, foreground flowers, light effect, and color scheme—all are essentially the same; and if the tone seems more somber in the oil, this is largely due to the different technique. The drawing of the figures, however, has improved considerably, showing how hard Burne-Jones had worked to make up for his lack of training and how aware he was that draftsmanship was his weakest point, both from hostile reviews of his early work in the press and the friendly advice of his mentor G. F. Watts. Awkward passages in the early version are also tidied up. The musician's left hand is rethought so that it no longer collides confusingly with the music book. The almost ludicrously prominent soles of the knight's feet are made less conspicuous, and his brown sleeves, which conflict with his red scarf in the watercolor, are replaced by black armour. As for the figure of Cupid, by far the most unsatisfactory passage in the early picture, it undergoes a complete metamorphosis. He sheds his eye bandage, exchanges his heavy drapery for a lighter and more revealing costume, adopts a graceful contrapposto, and folds his wings with becoming elegance.

All this reflects the impact that Florentine painting had had on Burne-Jones between the dates when the two versions were completed (1865 and 1877), a period which had included his last two visits to Italy (1871 and 1873). The changes must have taken place when the picture was worked on in 1872–73. It is noticeable that the figure of Love retains its original form in the miniature version of the composition included in the portrait of Maria Zambaco of 1870 (cat. no. 49), and there exists a nude study for the figure in its new form which clearly dates from the early 1870s.³ So aware of linear rhythm and pattern had Burne-Jones become by this stage that even parts of the design which remain superficially the same are subtly modified. It is instructive to compare the two versions of the musician's dress, noting how he retains certain lines but changes others; to

observe how he improves the design of the foreground flowers, grouping them to form more satisfactory patterns in relation to the horizontals behind them; or again, to see how he breaks up the slightly awkward space between the knight's right arm and the musician's dress by introducing a spray of foliage. He was to remain hypersensitive to this kind of problem. In 1896 his assistant T. M. Rooke recorded his "worrying" [about] the shape between the Pilgrim's sleeve and his knee" in *Love Leading the Pilgrim* (cat. no. 74). It did not, he said, look "a good shape. Perhaps if some thorns were put there they might remedy it, if they were rightly designed. . . . It will be best not to paint them in today, but to let them soak into one's mind for a few days, and then we'll see."⁴

The large versions of *Le Chant d'Amour* and *Laus Veneris* have an important place in Burne-Jones's exhibition history. The 1878 exhibition at the Grosvenor was the gallery's second, and both the directors and Burne-Jones himself must have been anxious to maintain the overwhelming impression that his work had made in 1877. Nine works in all were shown, prominently hung in a place of honor in the East Gallery where they would attract maximum attention, and Graham's two large canvases were the focal point of the group. The rest, lent by Frederick Leyland, Alexander Ionides, and others, were smaller works or works executed some years earlier, which did not show the artist at the full extent of his power.

Press comment was far less hysterical than it had been the previous year. It is true that F. G. Stephens was a little dismissive of *Le Chant d'Amour*, describing it in the *Athenaeum* as having "'The City of Dreadful Night' for a background, and sundry other peculiarities inviting imaginative explanation," but this was because he was so excited by *Laus Veneris* that for him everything else paled by comparison.⁵ The *Times*, which had muttered darkly in 1877 about "freaks of eccentricity" and "the strange and unwholesome fruits of hopeless wanderings in the mazes of mysticism and medievalism,"⁶ was now willing to accept the artist on his own terms. "It would be difficult to imagine more thorough absorption of the spirit of an earlier art than these pictures indicate in their painter. The 'Jardin [*sic*] d'Amour' affects us like an echo of Carpaccio. If art is to be an echo, this may well be pronounced art of a high and beautiful kind."⁷ As for the *Illustrated London News*, after some almost ritualistic grumbling about Burne-Jones being "occasionally so transcendental as to be temporarily incomprehensible" and the usual chip-on-the-shoulder swipes at "the initiated," it suddenly came out with the surprising admission that he was, in spite of everything, "a very great artist."⁸

As in 1877, however, it was left to Henry James, reviewing the exhibition for the American magazine the *Nation*, to make the most intelligent comment. True to his stated principle of approaching the artist "good-humouredly and liberally [since] he offers an entertainment which is for us to take or to leave," he poked gentle fun at *Le Chant d'Amour* for representing "a group of three figures, seated, in rather an unexpected manner, upon the top of a garden wall." Nor was he entirely happy with

the results of Burne-Jones's scrupulous care for linear harmony. For him, the figures were so "extremely studied and finished in outline" that "they often strike one as vague in modelling—wanting in relief and in the power to detach themselves."

At the same time, James saw much to admire. He was enchanted by "the beautiful, rapt dejection of the mysterious young warrior," feeling that it would be hard to "know where to look for a more delicate rendering of a lovesick swain." He also considered the color "a great achievement," creating the effect of "some mellow Giorgione or some richly-glowing Titian." Where he was most perceptive and original, however, was in recognizing Burne-Jones's wholehearted concern with the creation of pictorial fictions. "It will be a matter of course," he wrote, "to say that the subjects are unreal, the type of figure monotonous and unpleasant, the treatment artificial, the intention obscure." All this, he believed, was essentially irrelevant since the works in question "have the great and rare merit that they are *pictures*. They are conceptions, representations; they have a great *ensemble*." This, for him, made Burne-Jones's contributions, whatever their faults, "far away the most interesting and remarkable things in the exhibition," and placed the artist head and shoulders above his peers. "No English painter of our day," he concluded, "has a title of his 'distinction.'"⁹

After its appearance at the Graham sale, *Le Chant d'Amour* was in two major collections before it left England to find a home in New York. First it belonged to the Lincolnshire collector Joseph Ruston, who, like Graham himself, bought extensively in both Old Master and modern fields. In addition to *Le Chant d'Amour*, he owned three paintings by Burne-Jones that had previously been in the Leyland collection, *The Mirror of Venus* (fig. 86) and *Day and Night* (1870; both Fogg Art Museum, Cambridge, Mass.). Ruston also owned important Rossettis, notably *Veronica Veronese* (1872; Delaware Art Museum), as well as examples by Watts, Leighton, and other contemporaries. Ruston's collection was sold at Christie's in May 1898, a month before Burne-Jones's death, and *Le Chant d'Amour* was acquired by Thomas Henry Ismay (1837–1899), in whose family it remained until the 1940s. Ismay was one of a group of Liverpool shipowners and merchants who collected the work of Burne-Jones and his followers, almost certainly inspired by the great example of F. R. Leyland.

[JC]

1. Information kindly supplied by Oliver Garnett.
2. The large version was sold at Sotheby's on June 19, 1990, lot 32.
3. British Museum, London (1954–5–8–16; see British Museum Collection, 1994, no. 62, illus. p. 91). As often happened, Burne-Jones later misdated the drawing from memory, in this instance assigning it to 1865, the date of the early watercolor. A careful composition drawing (formerly collection of Sir John and Lady Witt; sold Sotheby's, February 19, 1987, lot 173) is of little help in this context since it is clearly a *ricordo* of the oil version in The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.
4. *Memorials*, vol. 2, p. 296.
5. *Athenaeum*, no. 2638, May 18, 1878, p. 642.
6. *Times* (London), May 1, 1877, p. 10.
7. *Ibid.*, May 2, 1878, p. 7.
8. *Illustrated London News*, May 4, 1878, p. 411.
9. James 1956, pp. 162–64.



85.

Saint George

1873–77

Oil on canvas, 61¼ x 22¼ in. (155 x 57 cm)

PROVENANCE: William Graham; Cowper collection, Panshanger

EXHIBITED: Grosvenor Gallery, London, 1877, no. 64; Arts Council 1975–76, no. 134

Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford. The Ella Gallup Sumner and Mary Catlin Sumner Collection Fund (1961.448)

86.

Saint George

1897–98

Oil on canvas, 97¼ x 47¼ in. (247 x 120 cm)

Signed and dated lower left: EBJ 1897

PROVENANCE: Ernst Ludwig, Grand Duke of Hesse

EXHIBITED: New Gallery 1898–99, no. 141

Collection Hessische Hausstiftung, Kronberg

NEW YORK ONLY

Separated in date by some twenty years, these two depictions of a favorite subject show Burne-Jones unwilling to abandon what he regarded as a good conception but renewing the image according to his stylistic development. Following the drawings and oils of 1865–67 for Birket Foster (cat. nos. 31–36), the figure of Saint George was pressed into service as one of three contributions to the huge commission for Morris stained glass (twenty-two figures in all) in the Hall at Peterhouse, Cambridge. Although his entry in the account book for September 1871 admits some haste over the cartoons—“Now I am off for Italy with the money I have so honourably earned”—Burne-Jones took time to give *Saint George* the calm dignity also accorded to *Saint Hugh* and *Saint Peter*, his lance serving as a vertical prop similar to the bishop’s crosier.¹ The first oil painting was begun in 1873 and largely repeats the stained-glass cartoon, though dispensing with the halo; on the saint’s shield, the princess is now shown in the nude, which emphasizes her vulnerability while providing a frisson of excitement within an otherwise hieratically dispassionate image. It is essentially the same Saint George who had vanquished the dragon in the painting of 1865, with not only the darkly burnished armor but also the overall coloring remaining largely unchanged, a misty blue-green landscape set off against the saint’s swirling red scarf. What Burne-Jones now adds is a serene monumentality, underscoring the saint’s role as a symbol of the steadfast Christian hero. He is, however, still virtually indistinguishable from the knight in *Le Chant d’Amour* (cat. no. 84), begun in 1868, and has features similar to those of one of the artist’s favorite studio models.

In 1887 Burne-Jones began the first of two later versions of the same image, one completed in 1892 and the second (the



86

present picture) in 1898, when it was shown at the New Gallery in London as one of his last exhibited works.² Nearly every detail of the design has undergone a subtle transformation. Instead of a wistful tilt of the head, the saint now stares impassively ahead, more of a Christian icon (as the device on his banner also signifies) than a romantic hero. The image of the rescued princess on his shield—like everything else in the composition, it has been given a more elongated treatment—has reverted to a more decorous draped form. The dragon's coils and the saint's armor have both benefited from the artist's careful labors over the Perseus series. And the landscape, exuding an unusual dull fiery glow, has acquired the layers of basalt rock typical of 1890s backgrounds and rather unexpectedly relieved by a bunch of irises in the foreground—a device harking back to *Pan and Psyche* (cat. no. 103).³

1. Sewter 1974–75, vol. 2, p. 46. The cartoon for *Saint George* belongs to Peterhouse, Cambridge, along with that for *Hugo de Balsham* (*Saint Hugh*); both are reproduced in Fitzwilliam Museum 1980, nos. 77, 78.
2. T. M. Rooke's studio diary notes that Burne-Jones was "finishing tall St. George" on April 16, 1897 (Lago 1981, p. 141). Schleinitz 1901, p. 12, reproduces a photograph of the painting before completion.
3. There are slight differences of detail between the two canvases: the first,

82½ x 26 in. (210 x 66 cm), signed and dated 1892 and acquired by George Howard (by then the Earl of Carlisle), has a less rocky background; the saint is wearing his helmet, and the banner is richly embroidered. This picture (whereabouts unknown) was shown at the New Gallery in 1898–99 (no. 92).

Pygmalion and the Image

1875–78

PROVENANCE: Bought from the artist by Frederick Craven (sold 1895); presented by Sir John Throckmorton Middlemore, Baronet, 1903

EXHIBITED: Grosvenor Gallery, London, 1879, nos. 167–70; Royal Jubilee Exhibition, Manchester, 1887, nos. 199–202; New Gallery 1892–93, nos. 47–50; Arts Council 1975–76, nos. 137a–d; Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna 1986, nos. 33–36; Art Services International 1995–96, nos. 105–8

Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery (1903P23–26)

NEW YORK AND BIRMINGHAM

87a.

I. The Heart Desires

Oil on canvas, 39 x 30 in. (99 x 76.3 cm)

Signed and dated: E. BURNE-JONES inv 1868 pinxit 1878





Edward Burne-Jones, *Pygmalion and the Image*:
I. *The Heart Desires*, 1868-69. Oil on canvas,
26 x 20 in. (66 x 51 cm). Private collection



Edward Burne-Jones, *Pygmalion and the Image*:
II. *The Hand Refrains*, 1868-69. Oil on canvas,
26 x 20 in. (66 x 51 cm). Private collection



Edward Burne-Jones, *Pygmalion and the Image*:
III. *The Godhead Fires*, 1868-69. Oil on canvas,
26 x 20 in. (66 x 51 cm). Private collection



Edward Burne-Jones, *Pygmalion and the Image*:
IV. *The Soul Attains*, 1868-69. Oil on canvas,
26 x 20 in. (66 x 51 cm). Private collection

87b.

II. The Hand Refrains

Oil on canvas, 39 x 30 in. (99 x 76.3 cm)

87c.

III. The Godhead Fires

Oil on canvas, 39 x 30 in. (99 x 76.3 cm)

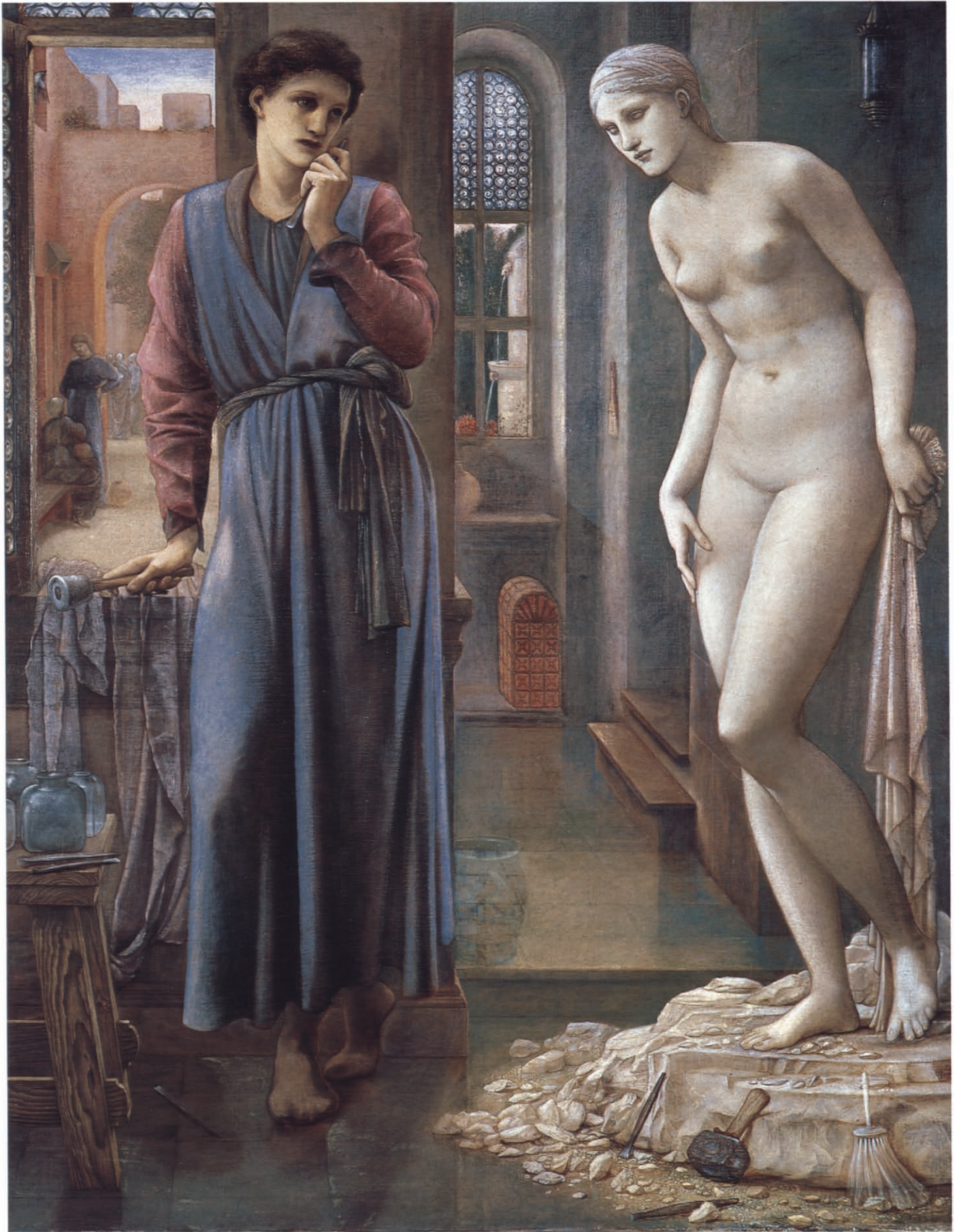
Signed and dated: EBJ 1878

87d.

IV. The Soul Attains

Oil on canvas, 39 x 30 in. (99 x 76.3 cm)

Like the Cupid and Psyche series (cat. nos. 40a-1), the Pygmalion paintings derive from drawings made as part of a proposed illustrated edition of Morris's cycle of poems *The Earthly Paradise*. In his work record Burne-Jones lists "12 subjects from Pygmalion" undertaken in 1867, and variations on these account for some twenty-eight surviving drawings, most of which are in the Birmingham collection.¹ From these he distilled a sequence of four images, which tell the basic story of Pygmalion and the Image, as given in the preamble to one of the shortest poems in Morris's collection: "A man of Cyprus, a sculptor named Pygmalion, made an image of a woman, fairer than any that had been seen, and in the end came to love his own handiwork as though it had been alive: wherefore, praying to Venus for help, he obtained his end, for she made the image alive indeed, and a woman, and Pygmalion wedded her."



87b



87c



87d

A first set of small oils (see illus. on p. 217) was commissioned in 1868 by Euphrosyne Cassavetti, the mother of Maria Zambaco, and completed in 1870.² Painted during the period of his infatuation with Maria (see cat. nos. 48, 49), these have a romantic, personal quality that goes beyond the appropriateness of the subject to her own talent as a sculptor: an interesting psychological interpretation is raised of the depiction of an artist balancing the creation of an aesthetic ideal against the reality of physical passion. The later oils have a lighter coloring and a sharper, clearer handling of detail and tone; they were begun in 1875 and finished in time for the second exhibition at the Grosvenor Gallery in 1878. They received a muted response from the critics, but Henry James, surprised at Burne-Jones's already huge following—"what is called in London a 'craze'"—nonetheless found *Pygmalion* to have "as much as ever the great merit—the merit of having a great charm."³

In *The Heart Desires* (the quatrain was supplied by Morris), Pygmalion is shown musing over the perfection of the female form, represented by a sculpture group in the traditional attitude of the Three Graces. Burne-Jones adds to the contrast with the earthy, frivolous local girls by giving the marble figures an abstractly disjointed reflection, one of his more than occasional excursions into pure painting of a very modern kind. The more detailed scene of *The Hand Refrains* offers a greater focus on the smooth perfection of the female form that the sculptor has created, underscored by the pile of rough chip-pings at her feet. A pentimento is clearly visible where, perhaps deciding there was too much distracting detail, Burne-Jones has painted out a large jar standing on the floor.

The Godhead Fires, which depicts Venus with Pygmalion's creation, Galatea, shows a substantial change from the first version, Burne-Jones having eliminated the background vignette of Pygmalion praying at an altar. The figure of Venus has been made more unearthly by the substitution of diaphanous material for the former heavy drapery. A pencil study for the head of Galatea, dated 1870 (Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery),⁴ has the unmistakable features of Maria Zambaco, but in both versions of the painting the resemblance has been diluted. This limpid composition was the most admired of the series: "We can scarcely imagine the story of Pygmalion being told more beautifully," wrote one critic, "and the canvas on which we see Venus imparting to Galatea the gift of life is worthy of Raphael."⁵

The Soul Attains was little altered from the 1870 oil. According to Georgiana Burne-Jones, the model for Pygmalion in the second version was the metalworker W. A. S. Benson (1854–1924).⁶

1. Twenty-two drawings, on tracing paper, are at Birmingham (612-632'27); three are in the William Morris Gallery, Walthamstow, and three more were in an album sold at Sotheby's, November 10, 1981, lot 26. An annotated list of the studies appears in Andreas Blühm, "Pygmalion: Die Ikono-graphie einer Künstlermythos zwischen 1500 und 1900," *Europäische Hochschulschriften* (European University Studies) 90 (1988), pp. 261–64.
2. Harrison and Waters 1973, colorpls. 20–23, and Art Services International 1995–96, figs. 93, 96, 97, 99; sold at Sotheby's, June 8–9, 1993, lot 24. A reference in Burne-Jones's work record seems to suggest that this first set of oils was retouched in 1883.
3. *Nation*, May 29, 1879; reprinted in James 1956, p. 182.
4. Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery (61'24); reproduced in Art Services International 1995–96, fig. 98.
5. *Art Journal*, July 1879, p. 135.
6. *Memorials*, vol. 2, p. 81.

The Perseus Series

Although he had made only limited progress toward the completion of Cupid and Psyche (cat. nos. 40a–1), and had begun serious work on only two of the major elements of the Story of Troy (cat. no. 50), Burne-Jones could not resist the temptation to take on another cycle of paintings in 1875. In the spring of that year the rising young Conservative politician Arthur Balfour (1848–1930) was taken by Lady Airlie to visit Burne-Jones's studio, where he "at once fell a prey both to the man and his art."¹ In his memoirs Balfour (who was to serve as Prime Minister from 1902 to 1906) described having bought a house at 4 Carlton Gardens in 1871: "It so happens that the principal drawing-room was, as London drawing-rooms go, long and well lit, and the happy thought occurred to me to ask my new friend to design for it a series of pictures characteristic of his art. . . . The subject I left

entirely to him. The choice of the Perseus Legend was therefore not mine, but I have never regretted it."²

Again Burne-Jones turned to Morris's *Earthly Paradise* for a poetic narrative of the legend, under the title "The Doom of King Acrisius." He also went to the British Museum library, looking particularly at treatments of the subject on Greek Attic vase painting; in a letter to his young son, Philip, he reported that he had been "looking up all the most ancient ways of portraying [*sic*] Medusa, and they are few but very interesting, and I know much more about it than I did."³ He quickly devised a sequence of ten subjects, mapped out in three large designs, showing their disposition around the walls, with decorative borders of Morris's acanthus wallpaper pattern. Four of the subjects, including those above the chimneypiece and doors, he intended to have executed as

gesso panels carved in relief and painted.⁴ As always when his imagination was newly fired, much preparatory work was begun, including a host of studies from the male and female nude, many dating from 1875 and 1877; one sketchbook dated July 1875 is largely filled with studies for the series.⁵

Full-scale cartoons in watercolor and bodycolor (cat. nos. 88–97) were begun in 1877 and completed in 1885, but only four of the designs were painted in oils; these are all now in the Staatsgalerie Stuttgart, along with two further unfinished canvases and two duplicate cartoons. Of the finished oils, *The Baleful Head* was shown as one of the artist's last exhibits at the Grosvenor Gallery in 1887, and two others (*The Rock of Doom* and *The Doom Fulfilled*) were exhibited at the New Gallery in 1888; *Perseus and the Graiae*, completed only in 1892, was sent to the Paris Salon in 1893. Critical reaction to the work was mixed, most commentators finding Burne-Jones's treatment of the legend rather dispassionate, although effective in its own terms: the art critic of the *Times* noticed perceptively how "action itself is conveyed in a strangely individual way; it is not so much action as the spirit of action."⁶ The reviewer for the *Art Journal* lamented a lack of human interest, and saw no attempt by the artist "to strike people by making them feel how the thing really took place; but he has woven luxurious, elaborate, and precious workmanship into a scheme of decorative import."⁷ F. G. Stephens, writing in the *Athenaeum*, agreed that "literal *vraisemblance* does not exist for our painter, who has devised, so to say, his own nature, and represents it in his own way, and for him it is sufficient that it is self-consistent and profoundly beautiful, and romantic in the noblest sense of that much abused term."⁸

Balfour was happy to receive what still provided a meaningful sequence of works, and was praised by Philip Burne-Jones for never trying "in any way to hasten him in a matter which he understood did not admit of haste, and my father

fully realised and appreciated his considerate conduct."⁹ The cartoons now at Southampton, which give an unusually complete idea of Burne-Jones's method of working out a detailed and complicated narrative, were framed and displayed in the artist's garden studio, where they were universally admired for their extraordinary vigor and dramatic power; Graham Robertson was not alone in his view that they "far surpassed any of them that ever reached completion."¹⁰

1. Arthur James, 1st Earl of Balfour, *Chapters of Autobiography* (London, 1930), p. 233.
2. *Ibid.*
3. *Memorials*, vol. 2, p. 58.
4. Tate Gallery, London (3456–3458), reproduced in Löcher 1973, figs. 19–21.
5. See *ibid.* for a very full account of the relationship of the many studies to each element of the series.
6. *Times* (London), May 9, 1888.
7. *Art Journal*, July 1888, p. 221.
8. *Athenaeum*, May 19, 1888, p. 635.
9. Burne-Jones 1900, p. 162.
10. Robertson 1931, p. 76.

88.

The Perseus Series: The Call of Perseus

1877

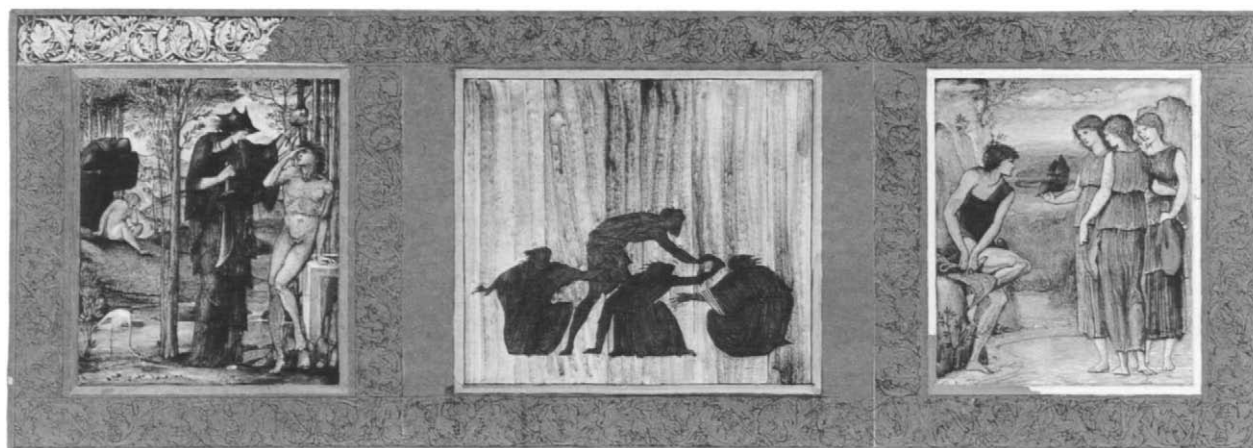
Bodycolor, 60 x 50 in. (152.5 x 127 cm)

PROVENANCE: Alexander Henderson; Lady Violet Henderson; purchased 1934

EXHIBITED: Arts Council 1975–76, no. 159

Southampton City Art Gallery (100)

The ancient Greek legend of Perseus was treated by, among others, Aeschylus and Ovid, and there are many variations of detail in later versions. In his cycle of paintings Burne-Jones concentrates on the most familiar episodes of



Edward Burne-Jones, *The Perseus Series: Design for the decorative scheme (I)*, ca. 1875. Pencil and watercolor, 16 x 42 in. (40.6 x 106.7 cm). Tate Gallery, London



88

the hero's search for the Gorgon Medusa and his rescue of Andromeda, which can be seen to provide obvious parallels with the quest of the Arthurian knights and the story of Saint George and the Dragon. In *The Earthly Paradise*, Morris prefaced "The Doom of King Acrisius" with this argument, which offers the necessary background to the series:

Acrisius, King of Argos, being warned by an oracle that the son of his daughter Danaë should slay him, shut her up in a brazen tower built for that end beside the sea: there, though no man could come nigh her, she nevertheless bore a son to Jove, and she and her new-born son, set adrift on the sea, came to the island of Seriphos. Thence her son, grown to manhood, set out to win the Gorgon's Head, and accomplished that end by the help of Minerva; and afterwards rescued Andromeda, daughter of Cepheus, from a terrible doom, and wedded her. Coming back to Seriphos he took his mother thence, and made for Argos, but by stress of weather came to Thessaly, and there, at Larissa, accomplished the prophecy, by unwittingly slaying Acrisius. In the end he founded the city of Mycenae, and died there.

This cartoon and *Perseus and the Sea Nymphs* (cat. no. 90) were Burne-Jones's first cartoons for the series; the corresponding oils (now at Stuttgart), of the same date, he left unfinished. Two scenes are here combined: an image of the dejected hero being approached by the hooded figure of the goddess Minerva and Minerva revealing herself to a startled Perseus. Goaded by Polydectes, King of Seriphos, Perseus has

sworn to bring back the head of Medusa, the most terrifying of the Gorgons in that her stare turns every living thing to stone. An enemy of the Gorgons, Minerva offers Perseus aid, in the form of a sword and a mirror, to deflect Medusa's fatal look.

One of Burne-Jones's notebooks includes a list of twenty-eight subjects, under the heading "Doom of Acrisius," which must have occurred to him as likely visual counterparts to Morris's poem, perhaps at an early stage when an illustrated edition of *The Earthly Paradise* was still under consideration.¹ The painting corresponds to the entry "Perseus meeting Minerva as old woman—M. changing to goddess, giving him armour," but indicates that the artist, while reluctant to keep to the letter of Morris's imagery, was prepared to modify slightly his own first conception. Although he portrays Minerva with "a fair breast-plate," she has no "hauberk to her knees" but heavy drapery, making her presence as powerful as that of the complementary figure of the goddess in *The Wheel of Fortune* (cat. no. 52).

1. Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge; see Löcher 1973, pp. 48–49.

89.

The Perseus Series: Perseus and the Graiae

ca. 1877–80

Bodycolor, 60 x 67 1/8 in. (152.5 x 170.5 cm)

PROVENANCE: Alexander Henderson; Lady Violet Henderson;

purchased 1934

Southampton City Art Gallery (101)

To find Medusa, Perseus first has to seek out the sea nymphs who inhabit a cave on the island of Seriphos. Its whereabouts are known only to the Graiae, three sisters of the Gorgons, who have between them only one eye and one tooth. Perseus takes the eye while it is being passed from one to another, forcing the weird sisters to tell him the way. Burne-Jones sets the scene in a barren, stylized landscape that he described in a related sketch as "greyland—a gleaming rosy light only."¹

This was the first of four panels in the series intended to be three-dimensional, in painted gesso. Forming the central part of the first wall, it would have served as a focal point, and therefore carries an inscription explaining the entire story, in a Latin text provided by the classical scholar Richard Jebb. In translation this reads: "Pallas Athene with her urging spurred Perseus to action and equipped him with arms. The blind sisters of the Gorgons revealed to him the remote home of the nymphs. From there he went with wings on his feet and with his head shrouded in darkness, and with his sword struck the one Gorgon who was subject to death—the others were immortal. Her two sisters arose and pursued him. Next he turned Atlas to stone, the sea-serpent was slain and Andromeda



89

rescued, and the comrades of Phineus became lumps of rock. Then Andromeda looked with wonder, in a mirror, at the dreadful Medusa.²

The work was duly executed in relief and exhibited at the Grosvenor Gallery in 1878, to the general bafflement of critics and public alike, who were unable to understand its purpose. It still survives (in a private collection) and is a quite extraordinary object, the gold lettering especially effective against the oak-grain background, and the swirling drapery of the Graiae (studied to telling effect in three pencil drawings on green paper, dated 1877) transformed into a brilliant, shimmering mass, in gold and silver riveted to the wood ground.³ It would have created a far greater impact in one of the later displays of the Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society.

1. Sketchbook, Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge; see Löcher 1973, p. 99.

2. As translated in Michael Cassin, *The Perseus Story: Ten Paintings by Sir Edward Burne-Jones* (exh. cat., Southampton City Art Gallery, n.d.).

3. Löcher 1973, fig. 37; the three drawings are in Hammersmith Public Libraries; one is reproduced in *ibid.*, fig. 40.

90.

The Perseus Series: Perseus and the Sea Nymphs (The Arming of Perseus)

1877

Bodycolor, 60 1/8 x 49 3/4 in. (152.8 x 126.4 cm)

PROVENANCE: Alexander Henderson; Lady Violet Henderson; purchased 1934

EXHIBITED: Arts Council 1975–76, no. 162

Southampton City Art Gallery (102)



90

Various identified as the Nereids (sea nymphs) or as the Stygian nymphs inhabiting the threshold of the underworld—they do not appear in Morris's narrative—these three maidens provide Perseus with the equipment he needs to ensnare Medusa. The nymphs, adopting an attitude of the Three Graces,

offer him the winged sandals of Hermes, a helmet of invisibility, and a *kibisis*, or magic pouch, in which to place the Gorgon's head. There are a number of related studies, especially for the heads of the nymphs: the one on the right is identifiable as a portrait of Frances, the daughter of Burne-Jones's patron William Graham.

A later head study (Whitworth Art Gallery, University of Manchester) is inscribed and dated 1897, supporting the note in Burne-Jones's retrospective record of his pictures of work undertaken in that year "on the 2 Perseus pictures of the 'Call' & the 'Arming.'"¹ Like *The Call of Perseus* (cat. no. 88), the oil (now at Stuttgart) remained unfinished.

1. See Löcher 1973, p. 50, fig. 49.

91.

The Perseus Series: The Finding of Medusa

ca. 1882

Bodycolor, 60 x 54¼ in. (152.5 x 137.7 cm)

PROVENANCE: Alexander Henderson; Lady Violet Henderson; purchased 1934

EXHIBITED: Arts Council 1975–76, no. 164

Southampton City Art Gallery (103)

Now cave-pierced rocks there rose up everywhere,
And gaunt old trees, of leaves and fruit all bare;

And midst this wretchedness a mighty hall,
Whose great stones made a black and shining wall;
The doors were open, and thence came a cry
Of one in anguish wailing bitterly . . .

In the original design for the scheme this scene takes place in the wood of "gaunt old trees" described in Morris's poem, but in this and the duplicate cartoon at Stuttgart (rather more finished but less spontaneous), Burne-Jones has fixed on an indeterminate "cave-pierced" landscape in which Medusa paces while her sisters crouch beneath their wings. Morris goes on to describe Medusa (like Nimuë; see cat. no. 64) as having snakes entangled in her hair, but in the incomplete form of this cartoon Burne-Jones emphasizes only her terrible stare, perhaps showing her awareness of the intruder's presence as "now behind her unseen Perseus passed." In addition to fine pencil studies for the head of Medusa, there are two bold designs for the figure of Perseus in armor (one of a historical kind, the other of the artist's invention), one in Birmingham, the other at the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge.¹

1. For the Fitzwilliam study (679), see Löchner 1973, fig. 64.



Edward Burne-Jones. Study of armor for *The Finding of Medusa*, 1881. Watercolor and bodycolor, 15 x 10¼ in. (38.3 x 26.4 cm). Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery



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92.

The Perseus Series: The Death of Medusa (I)

ca. 1882

Bodycolor, 49 x 46 in. (124.5 x 116.9 cm)

PROVENANCE: Alexander Henderson; Lady Violet Henderson; purchased 1934

Southampton City Art Gallery (109)

Intended as the second of the three-dimensional panels, this design, which exists only in the form of this cartoon, gives a good idea of how effective would have been the combination of gilding and low-relief modeling. Perseus looks away from Medusa's head, now wreathed with snakes, some of which fall to the ground; he is unaware that Medusa is pregnant with the

children of Poseidon, and as he strikes the head from her body, they emerge in the shape of Chrysaor and the winged horse Pegasus (in some accounts of the legend Medusa has the body of a horse). This act gives Minerva her revenge on Medusa, who had conceived inside a temple dedicated to the goddess.

Within this strange, almost surreal, design are deliberate references to classical sculpture, both in the bodies of Medusa and Pegasus, reminiscent of those on the Parthenon friezes, and in the disconcerting disparity of scale, which is at the same time quite modern and reminiscent of the conventions of Greek vase painting. The placing of the body of Chrysaor relative to the composition echoes Burne-Jones's similar decorative use of the subsidiary figure of Aquarius in his 1879 cartoon for *Saturn* (cat. no. 123).



93

93. **The Perseus Series: The Death of Medusa (II)**

ca. 1881–82

Bodycolor, 60 x 53¼ in. (152.5 x 136.5 cm)

PROVENANCE: Alexander Henderson; Lady Violet Henderson;
purchased 1934

EXHIBITED: Arts Council 1975–76, no. 167

Southampton City Art Gallery (104)

The most dramatic in the series, this composition was refined and greatly improved by Burne-Jones from the horizontal format of the original scheme, which lacked the dynamic sense of energy now captured as Perseus makes his escape from Medusa's enraged sisters, thrusting Medusa's head into his pouch as he flies off. In this magnificent design he transcends Morris's prosaic account of their "rising up with curses vain," inventing an image of dark horror and bitter frenzy.



Edward Burne-Jones. Study of wings for *The Death of Medusa (II)*, 1881. Pencil, 22½ x 9¾ in. (58 x 26 cm). Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery



94

It can be seen that the paper has been squared for transfer, presumably to the second cartoon now at Stuttgart, which shows the Gorgons draped but is darker and less impressive. Among the preparatory studies for this design are three superb pencil drawings of wings, dated (retrospectively) 1881 and 1882.¹

1. One in the Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery (447'27), two in the Manchester City Art Gallery; see Löcher 1973, figs. 82–84.

94.

The Perseus Series: Atlas Turned to Stone

ca. 1878

Bodycolor, 59 $\frac{1}{8}$ x 74 $\frac{7}{8}$ in. (150.2 x 190.2 cm)

PROVENANCE: Alexander Henderson; Lady Violet Henderson; purchased 1934

Southampton City Art Gallery (105)

This subject, for which this is the only cartoon, would have been the third panel executed in relief. It shows Atlas, one of the Titans defeated by Zeus and condemned to stand forever upon the earth, holding up the sky (represented here by a misty globe containing zodiacal signs). By revealing the head of Medusa, Perseus turns him into stone. Accounts differ as to whether this was by Atlas's wish, to relieve his eternal misery, or whether he had refused Perseus hospitality.

The entry "Worked on Atlas for Perseus set" appears in Burne-Jones's work record under the year 1878, by which time he had revised his idea of illustrating Morris's description of the unfriendly Atlas as a king feasting in a hall filled with gigantic men, all of whom Perseus turns to stone: "Turning folk into stone in Atlas' hall—great big brutes of chaps."¹

1. Löcher 1973, pp. 48, 104.



95

95. The Perseus Series: The Rock of Doom

ca. 1884–85

Bodycolor, 60 $\frac{7}{8}$ x 50 $\frac{5}{8}$ in. (154 x 128.6 cm)

PROVENANCE: Alexander Henderson; Lady Violet Henderson;
purchased 1934

Southampton City Art Gallery (107)

He came within the scarped cliff's purple shade,
And found a woman standing lonely there,
Naked, except for tresses of her hair
That o'er her white limbs by the breeze were wound,
And brazen chains her weary arms that bound
Unto the sea-beat overhanging rock . . .

On his way back to Seriphos, Perseus catches sight of Andromeda, the daughter of Cepheus, King of Joppa, who has been offered as a sacrifice to the sea god Poseidon. Burne-Jones's original intention was to combine in one image

the arrival of Perseus and his fight with the sea monster sent by Poseidon, and he worked on such a painting for several months in 1876. In a letter written in September of that year he describes the anguish of failing to achieve a satisfactory resolution of the half that eventually became *The Rock of Doom*:

I have worked solely at Andromeda and at last it begins to look what I wanted it to be—but all the sick weeks I worked at it when I ought to have done nothing nearly ruined it. You see I began to play with it and filled it with little houses and fields and roads, and walled gardens and mills, and bushes and winding shores and islands, and one day the veil was lifted and I saw how every pretty incident helped to ruin the thing, and I had three days of havoc at it and took them all out; and now in their place is a grey, doleful rock, but for the first time there is hope in the picture. It is folly to work when one cannot, and blasphemous to change one's first design.¹



Edward Burne-Jones, *Perseus and Andromeda*, begun 1876 (unfinished). Oil on canvas, 60 x 90 in. (152.2 x 229 cm). Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide

The oil, in which all the figures are nude, was taken close to completion and then abandoned.

Burne-Jones seems to have started work on two separate canvases in the winter of 1884–85. In *The Rock of Doom* he relegates the elaborate cityscape to the background and conforms more to Morris's verse, focusing on the moment at which Perseus reveals himself by removing his helmet of invisibility.



The oil painting now at Stuttgart, exhibited at the New Gallery in 1888, is essentially identical, with the waves and rocks more neatly finished and with greater definition given to the buildings in the right corner.

1. *Memorials*, vol. 2, pp. 68–69.

96.

The Perseus Series: The Doom Fulfilled

ca. 1884–85

Bodycolor, 60½ x 54½ in. (153.8 x 138.4 cm)

PROVENANCE: Alexander Henderson; Lady Violet Henderson; purchased 1934

Southampton City Art Gallery (106)

Having released Andromeda from her chains, Perseus tackles the monster, which Morris describes as being “maned with grey tufts of hair, as some old tree / Hung round with moss.” Preparatory studies dating from 1875 show that Burne-Jones always had in mind something more like an

actual sea serpent, with great blue-black coils burnished like Perseus's own armor.¹ This gives more credence to the fight than the depiction in *Saint George Slaying the Dragon* (cat. no. 35), on which F. G. Stephens was to comment that “the dragon, although grim enough for a modern dragon, has hard measure from the better armed and more powerful St. George.”² It also provides a greater, and undeniably erotic, contrast with the callipygian figure of Andromeda, one of Burne-Jones's most limpid depictions of the female nude.

These last two cartoons, taken to a greater degree of finish, are reproduced almost exactly in corresponding oils, although Burne-Jones made one amendment in eliminating the pouch slung round Perseus's body, allowing a clearer focus on his sword, called “blue-edged Herpe” by Morris.

1. See Löcher 1973, pp. 105–6, where some twenty-four studies in all are identified for *The Doom Fulfilled*, more than for any other picture in the series.
2. *Athenaeum*, February 23, 1895, p. 257.



97.

The Perseus Series: The Baleful Head

1885

Bodycolor, 60½ x 50¾ in. (153.7 x 129 cm)

PROVENANCE: Alexander Henderson; Lady Violet Henderson; purchased 1934

Southampton City Art Gallery (108)

In order to convince Andromeda of his divine origins and win her hand in marriage, Perseus shows her the head of Medusa, taking care that they look at it in the reflection of a well. Burne-Jones's first idea for the composition was quite different, showing Andromeda crouching to look at the reflection in a pool; a sequence of thumbnail sketches in a sketchbook now in the Victoria and Albert Museum reveals the final resolution taking shape.¹ After the bleak, unearthly settings of the previous scenes, the bright flowering of this unexpected classical garden comes as a welcome relief. The symmetry of the figures, with the ingenious juxtaposition of their reflections, is at once strengthened by the richly grained marble and offset by the sinuous trunk of the apple tree. It is a memorable image, one that attracted favorable comment from the critics when the oil (now at Stuttgart) was shown at the Grosvenor Gallery in 1887. F. G. Stephens found "the poetry of the design . . . strikingly in harmony with the subject," and judged that the painting would "no doubt take a place inferior only to *King Cophetua* and *The Golden Stairs*."²

1. Löcher 1973, figs. 131–34.

2. *Athenaeum*, April 30, 1887, p. 584; May 7, 1887, p. 613.

98.

Sketchbook

1875

Pencil and chalk, 10 x 7½ in. (25.4 x 18.2 cm)

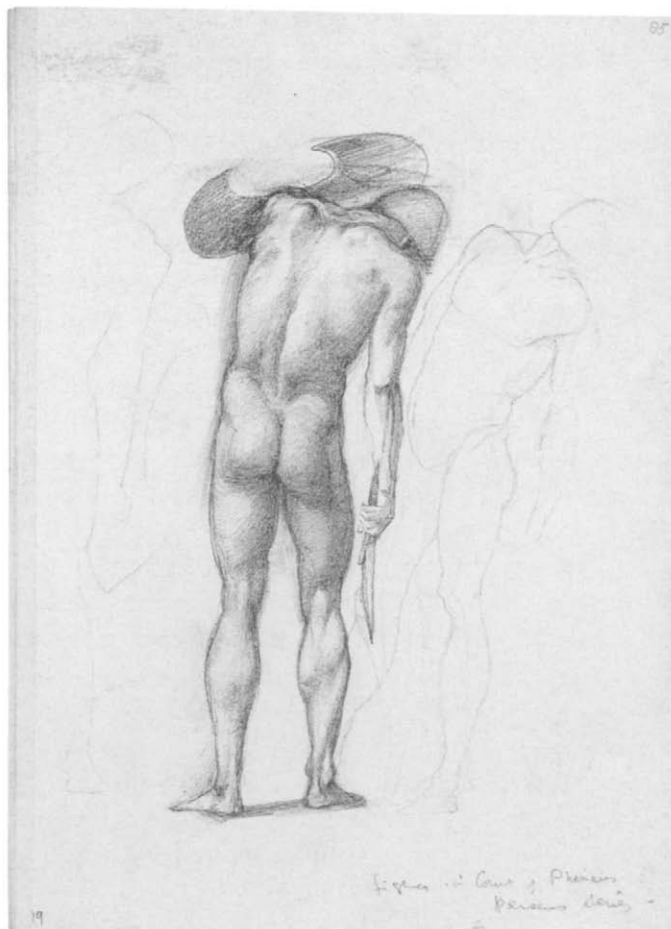
Inscribed on inside cover: July 1875

PROVENANCE: Presented by Mrs. Angela Thirkell, 1952

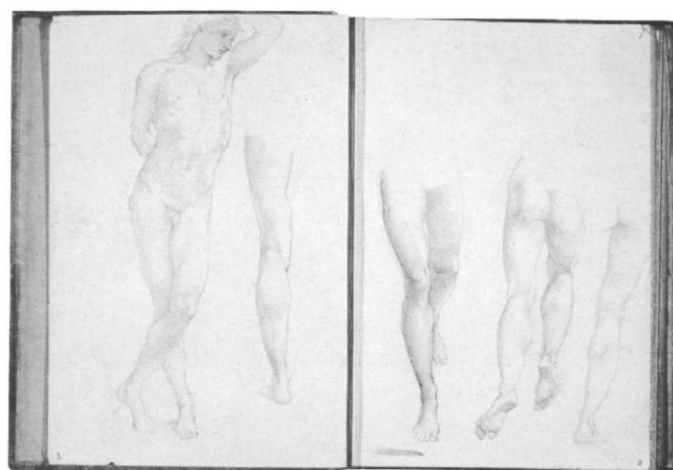
EXHIBITED: Arts Council 1975–76, no. 176

Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery (1952P5)

The Baleful Head (cat. no. 97) does not quite represent the end of the story. The subsequent wedding feast is interrupted by Phineus, previously betrothed to Andromeda, and Perseus is again obliged to wield the Gorgon's head, turning Phineus and his followers to stone. In the original decorative scheme, Burne-Jones had envisaged the Court of Phineus as forming the penultimate scene, as the last of the four carved panels, over a doorcase and preceding *The Baleful Head*. Some splendid male nude studies are to be found in the Birmingham sketchbook, but no cartoon was ever begun. Shown here are



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Edward Burne-Jones, Sketchbook, 1875. Pencil, one sheet with bodycolor or on prepared ground, 10¼ x 7½ in. (27.2 x 19.4 cm). Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery (1952P4)

some of the powerful studies for the retainers of Phineus, Burne-Jones posing his models to give the sense of weight as their bodies are transformed into stone.¹ The sketchbook (now reduced to twenty-one pages) also contains studies for *Atlas Turned to Stone*, *The Rock of Doom*, and *The Doom Fulfilled*, as well as male nude studies for *The Romaunt of the Rose*.

Another sketchbook also at Birmingham, with seventeen remaining leaves, also contains studies for the Perseus series,

including several for the body of the Gorgon in the first treatment of *The Death of Medusa* (cat. no. 92), one of which is dazzlingly rendered in white bodycolor on a blue ground.² The double-page spread reproduced here is representative of the hundreds, if not thousands, of studies from the live model which Burne-Jones produced as a result of the daily practice of draftsmanship. He once said, "I only get tired when doing nothing." Drawing, whether purposefully in pursuit of a preestablished pose or just for the pleasure of putting pencil to paper, was an essential prerequisite of his life as an artist.

The drawings are typical of Burne-Jones's use of a fine but soft pencil, in which he set himself high standards of finish: "It is always touch and go whether I can manage it even now," he said in 1896. "Sometimes knots will come into it, and I never can get them out, I mean little black specks . . . if I've once india-rubbed it, it doesn't make a good drawing."³ The more finished pairs of legs on the right-hand page are intended for the flying Gorgons in the second *Death of Medusa* (cat. no. 93). Interestingly, these studies from the male nude were applied to (the admittedly hefty) female figures in the painting, a practice not uncommon for Burne-Jones, in the light of his remark, "A woman's shape is best in repose, but the fine thing about a man is that he is such a splendid machine, so you can put him in motion, and make as many knobs and joints and muscles about him as you please."⁴

1. Preparatory studies for these figures are in the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge; see Löcher 1973, figs. 119, 120.
2. Löcher 1973, nos. 5f–h, figs. 69, 70.
3. Lago 1981, p. 84 (entry for January 18, 1896).
4. *Memorials*, vol. 2, p. 269.

99.

The Passing of Venus: Painted fan

ca. 1880

Watercolor on vellum, 11 x 20¹/₈ in. (28 x 51 cm)

PROVENANCE: By descent from Margaret Burne-Jones

EXHIBITED: *Treasures from Sussex Houses: Bronzino to Boy George*, Brighton Museum, 1985, no. 141

Private collection

100.

The Passing of Venus: Design for tapestry

1898

Bodycolor on cardboard, 16¹/₈ x 38³/₈ in. (40.8 x 98.2 cm)

PROVENANCE: Salle Drouot, Paris, October 13, 1950; Grégoire Tarnopol

EXHIBITED: *Delaware Art Museum* 1976, no. 4–61

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Rogers Fund, 1962 (62.167)
NEW YORK AND BIRMINGHAM



99, front



99, back





100

IOI.

The Passing of Venus

Designed 1898; woven 1922–26

Wool, silk, and linen tapestry, 106 x 232¼ in. (2.7 x 5.9 m); executed by Morris & Company

Inscribed on scrolls along upper border: *Comment des jeunes colombeaux / En ung char qui fut riche et beaux / Mainent Venus en lost d'Amours / pour lui faire hatif secours* (How some young doves pull Venus in a chariot that was rich and beautiful to the group of lovers in order to help them without delay)

PROVENANCE: Commissioned by George G. Booth for the Detroit Institute of Arts, 1922 (presented 1927)

EXHIBITED: Delaware Art Museum 1976, no. 4–63; Woven Splendor, Detroit Institute of Arts, 1996, no. 19

The Detroit Institute of Arts. Gift of George G. Booth (27.152)
NEW YORK AND BIRMINGHAM



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Certain ideas that emanated from Burne-Jones's ever-fertile imagination never quite came to fruition. One of these was the Passing of Venus. Conceived as a design (referred to as "Triumph of Love") for a tile panel in 1861,¹ the image of Venus riding in a chariot drawn by doves, with young maidens offering their hearts up to her as she passes, reappears twelve years later as the background decoration in *Laus Veneris* (cat. no. 63). The amalgam of literary sources includes the medieval *Romaunt de la Rose* and Chaucer's reworking of it, together with the concept of Love Triumphant from Petrarch's *Trionfi*. A "triumph of Venus for a long picture for Percy Wyndham" is listed under 1875 in Burne-Jones's work record, followed in 1878 by a "golden panel of triumph of Love for Duke of Westminster," executed in gilt gesso; in 1881 there is an additional entry: "Passing of Venus begun."

The "long picture" perhaps begun in 1875 is probably the oil on panel known as *The Passing of Venus*, last seen on the art market in 1973.² One of Burne-Jones's strangest works, it is completely changed from the first "Triumph of Love," retaining only the position of Venus at the upper left of the composition; apparently unfinished, her ethereal naked form sits on an odd winged plinth. Three young women below avert their eyes from her, while a further apprehensive group of female figures on the right clusters around the Greek woman poet Sappho. A bleak mountainous landscape provides a backdrop. It seems likely that the reference intended here was to the Sapphics in Swinburne's *Poems and Ballads* (a book dedicated to Burne-Jones on its publication in 1866), in which "the white implacable Aphrodite" returns in her chariot "Back to Lesbos, back to the hills whereunder / Shone Mitylene." Some superb pencil studies for the individual female figures, all dated 1877, are shared between the Tate Gallery and Birmingham; appropriately for this peculiar project, they are all given a distinctive appearance by being drawn on an olive-green prepared ground.³

The delicately painted fan (cat. no. 99) seems to be the first work in which all the elements of the composition are finally drawn together.⁴ In front of the car of Venus is interposed the figure of Cupid, almost identical to that in *Cupid's Hunting Fields* (cat. no. 115); he has already claimed one victim, and the Sapphic women look on anxiously as he again draws his bow. In addition to some background rocks akin to those in *The Rock of Doom* (cat. no. 95), Burne-Jones adds delightful decorative touches on the guards of the fan, symbolic of the earth, sea, and sky. On the reverse is a design of intertwining branches containing roundels of lovers embracing, reminiscent of the couples used to similar effect by Rossetti in the predella of *The Blessed Damozel* (1875–78; Fogg Art Museum, Cambridge, Mass.).

The painting apparently begun in 1881 must be the unfinished work, chiefly in bodycolor, now in the Tate Gallery, of which nothing more is heard.⁵ It must have been for this that Burne-Jones had a model of the chariot constructed, in wood and metal, complete with a wax figure of Venus.⁶ Only

toward the end of his life did the possibility arise of turning the subject into a tapestry; the very last entry in his retrospective list of work is: "Began design for the tapestry of the Passing of Venus, that the tradition of tapestry weaving at Merton Abbey might not be forgotten or cease." This, on which he was at work until the day of his death, June 16, 1898, is the bold design in bodycolor now in The Metropolitan Museum of Art (cat. no. 100). Georgiana Burne-Jones recalled that while "looking at the cartoon one day he said that he was going to alter the figure of Venus, because it was rather smaller than that of the others; and when asked whether it was not right for her to be so, because she was somewhat further off than they, he answered: 'I don't want her to be. Besides, figures diminished by distance are a bore in tapestry. That dear Morris who was so rightly minded, as he always was, had a very true saying about it. He was fond of insisting that heads in decoration ought to be of exactly the same size, and go one just behind the other like shillings in a row.'"⁷

A letter of June 30 from Philip Burne-Jones notified Henry Dearle, who had taken charge of the works after Morris's death, that he was "keeping back from the sale of my Father's works [the first studio sale at Christie's, July 16, 1898] the Tapestry design he was at work at up to within a short time of his death—which I believe you intended to work out in tapestry . . . if you have enough to go upon or if the design is sufficient for your purposes."⁸ Dearle later wrote that Burne-Jones "had partly executed—about half finished—a small sketching cartoon of the figures when he died so that I had to complete the designs from this roughly executed design—everything in the tapestry is mine—the background, the foreground, the pattern on the draperies and all the details were designed by me."⁹ There is an element of defensive exaggeration in this account, which occurred in correspondence with George Booth, a patron of the Detroit Institute of Arts, who commissioned a second weaving (cat. no. 101) in 1922.¹⁰ A first version, woven between 1901 and 1907, was unfortunately destroyed by fire at the Brussels Exhibition of 1910; it had had a simpler border of acanthus leaves but lacked the inscription (from the old French *Romaunt de la Rose*), which Dearle suggested to Booth.¹¹

1. The entry "Triumph of Love for Tiles 2-o-o" appears in Burne-Jones's account book with Morris, Marshall, Faulkner & Co., under 1861. The design, in pencil, crayon, and ink, is reproduced in Harrison and Waters 1973, fig. 59 (private collection), but no such tiles are known to have been executed.

2. Sotheby's Belgravia, November 20, 1973, lot 48, 22½ x 45½ in. (57 x 115.5 cm).

3. Tate Gallery (No4638, A00061, A00062); Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery (64-66'11).

4. "The design first made its appearance upon a fan in water-colour, and was not begun as a picture till 1881" (Burne-Jones 1900, p. 164).

5. Tate Gallery, presented by the Trustees of the Chantrey Bequest, 1919 (No3453; 42 x 98 in. [106.9 x 249.4 cm]); Tate Gallery 1993, no. 63.

6. The model is reproduced in Burne-Jones 1900, p. 162.

7. *Memorials*, vol. 2, p. 331.

8. Quoted in Parry 1983, p. 117.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 118.



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10. See Alan Phipps Darr, in *Woven Splendor: Five Centuries of European Tapestry in the Detroit Institute of Arts* (exh. cat., Detroit Institute of Arts, 1996), pp. 70–71.

11. The 1901–7 weaving was photographed in color and is reproduced in Parry 1983, p. 119.

102.

An Angel Playing a Flageolet

1878

Watercolor, bodycolor, and gold, 29½ x 24 in. (74.9 x 61.2 cm)

Signed: EB-J 1878

PROVENANCE: Bought from the artist by Agnew's, London, 1888; sold to George Holt, Liverpool, 1889; bequeathed by his daughter Emma Holt, 1944

Board of Trustees of the National Museums and Galleries on Merseyside; Liverpool (Emma Holt Bequest, Sudley House; 192)

Burne-Jones recorded “Three small panels in oil of angels,” together with “Same figures in water-colour on bigger scale,” under the year 1881 in his retrospective list of work. Such a small oil on panel dated 1881, of an angel with a flageolet facing to the right, belonged to William Connal and is now in the Glasgow Art Gallery and Museum. This watercolor predates the 1881 group and effectively reproduces a stained-glass design of 1877, for one of three minstrel angels in the tracery of a window in the Regimental Chapel (south choir aisle, east) at Christ Church Cathedral, Oxford.¹ A full-length angel musician holding a violin and a palm, designed in 1874 also for Christ Church, was similarly turned into a finished watercolor, with the same type of drapery and treatment of wings and an identical marble frame background.² Also known is an image of an angel with cymbals, again with the same background and probably also in watercolor.³

This type of decorative angelic figure had its origin in early cartoons, such as those of

1862 for the six trefoils in the tracery of the east window at Saint Michael, Lyndhurst (see cat. no. 21).⁴ There are few new designs of this kind for Morris & Company after 1880, however, and when called upon again for fresh angel subjects in 1898, for the Gladstone memorial window at Hawarden church, Burne-Jones made his famous remark: “I must have by now designed enough to fill Europe.”⁵ That he nevertheless valued them as symbols of spirituality is confirmed by a comment made by Oscar Wilde in his lecture “The English Renaissance of Art,” given in New York in January 1882: “I remember once, in talking to Mr. Burne Jones about modern science, his saying to me, ‘the more materialistic science becomes, the more angels shall I paint: their wings are my protest in favour of the immortality of the soul.’”⁶

Two of the later oils were exhibited at the Grosvenor Gallery in 1882 (no. 292) and 1883 (no. 14), each simply as *An Angel*; one critic thought the latter “a most brilliant and powerful exercise in colour, . . . [with] much grace and animation in the figure.”⁷ These, and watercolors such as the Liverpool



Edward Burne-Jones, *A Musical Angel*, ca. 1878–80. Watercolor and bodycolor, 64 x 22 in. (160.5 x 56 cm). Nelson Atkins Museum of Art, Kansas City

Angel, had a direct appeal that has lasted until the present day, but their apparent simplicity belies much careful study on the artist's part, especially in the historical representation of the angel figure. An undated sketchbook includes notes on the painting of angels' wings in the medieval Apocalypse manuscript Douce 180, which Burne-Jones seems to have looked at in the Bodleian Library, Oxford: "wings carefully gradated / long feathers black / then burnt umber / then dull red / then fainter tone of same colour / then yellowish white / then white of different gradations."⁸

1. Sewter 1974–75, vol. 1, pl. 530, vol. 2, pp. 146–47. This is not noted in *Sudley: The Emma Holt Bequest* (Liverpool, 1971), p. 15.
2. Sewter 1974–75, vol. 1, pl. 497, vol. 2, p. 146. The watercolor was exhibited in the Herron Museum of Art in 1964 (no. 23, illus.).
3. Alexandre 1907, pl. 30.
4. Sewter 1974–75, vol. 1, pls. 116, 123–25, vol. 2, p. 124.
5. Letter to J. H. Dearle, quoted in *ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 91.

6. Wilde's lecture was delivered in Chickering Hall, New York, on January 9, 1882, and published in his *Essays and Lectures* (1908; 2d ed., London, 1909), p. 132.
7. F. G. Stephens, in *Athenaeum*, April 28, 1883, p. 547.
8. Sketchbook at Wightwick Manor (The National Trust), WIG/D/180.

103.

Pan and Psyche

ca. 1872–74

Oil on canvas, 24 x 21½ in. (61 x 54.6 cm)

Signed lower left: EBJ

PROVENANCE: Bought from the artist by Alexander Ionides; sold by him anonymously at Christie's, May 1, 1897, lot 120, 760 gns., to Agnew's;

Robert Henry Benson by 1898

EXHIBITED: New Gallery 1898–99, no. 61

Private collection

NEW YORK ONLY

It has often been suggested that this composition owes something to Piero di Cosimo's well-known painting *The Death of Procris* (ca. 1495), which had entered the National

Gallery, London, in 1862. If so, the reminiscence first appears in one of the illustrations to "The Story of Cupid and Psyche" in William Morris's *Earthly Paradise*, on which the painting is based. Morris originally intended his great cycle of narrative poems to be lavishly illustrated with woodcuts designed by Burne-Jones, who produced hundreds of designs for this purpose. In the event, the project proved too ambitious to realize, and the book appeared without illustrations in 1868–70; but the designs provided the artist with compositions for pictures until the end of his life. None were more fertile than those for "Cupid and Psyche," which he executed first, in 1865, and carried further than those for any of the other poems; forty-seven finished designs survive (Ashmolean Museum, Oxford) and many preliminary sketches (Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery, Pierpont Morgan Library, New York, and elsewhere). The story, which is taken from *The Golden Ass* of Apuleius, clearly had great significance for Burne-Jones, no doubt because it can be read as the soul's search for God. In this it is analogous to the legend of the Holy Grail, which he also interpreted time and again, regarding it as nothing less than "an explanation of life."¹

In the present design Psyche, having lost Cupid, the god of love, through her own disobedience, has thrown herself into a river in an attempt to kill herself; she is, however, saved, and comforted by Pan, the god of nature. In Morris's words:

But the kind river even yet did deem
That she should live, and, with all gentle care,
Cast her ashore within a meadow fair
Upon the other side, where Shepherd Pan
Sat looking down upon the water wan.

The picture is not dated and, unusually, does not appear in Burne-Jones's autograph work record (Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge) or its derivative, Malcolm Bell's monograph on the artist's work, *Record and Review* (1892). It is generally accepted, however, that it dates from the early 1870s and was produced concurrently with another, slightly larger version, which is well documented. According to the work record, the larger picture was "designed" in 1869, presumably meaning that this was when the *Earthly Paradise* design was adapted for an easel picture. In 1872 the picture itself was commissioned for £200 by George Hamilton, a business associate of Burne-Jones's chief patron, William Graham. In October of that year Burne-Jones wrote to Hamilton to report that it was "at last . . . becoming something like what I should wish it to be. I think it has given me more trouble than any other picture I have done, and I believe it will end by being one of my best. I hope now to be able to carry it through without further hindrance." In fact, the picture was not finished until 1874, and was retouched as late as 1878. Burne-Jones intended to show it that year at the Exposition Universelle in Paris, together with three other works, including *The Beguiling of Merlin* (cat. no. 64), but, as he told Hamilton, "At the first glance I saw much that I wanted to do to it, to make it more perfect." After he had

“spent about a week over it,” it was too late to send it to Paris, and it appeared instead at the Grosvenor Gallery’s summer exhibition.² *Laus Veneris* (cat. no. 63) and *Le Chant d’Amour* (cat. no. 84) were among its companions.

One can only speculate as to how the present picture relates to the other painting’s long and tangled development. Was it started for experimental purposes and completed to make an independent version, or was it rather in the nature of a fair copy? The figures and foreground are remarkably similar but the backgrounds differ considerably, with the austere Mantegnesque rocks in the Hamilton picture giving way to a sylvan landscape in the work exhibited here.

All we know about the latter is that it was bought by Alexander (Alecco) Ionides (1840–1898), a member of the wealthy Anglo-Greek family that figures so prominently in the annals of later Victorian art. Alecco had first made



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his mark in the mid-1850s when, as a student in Paris with his elder brother Luke, he joined the so-called Paris Gang, of which Whistler, Edward Poynter, and George du Maurier were also luminaries. In fact he appears as “the Greek” in *Trilby*, du Maurier’s romanticized account of the *vie de bohème*, published in 1894. Like his older brother Constantine (see cat. no. III), Alecco was a passionate collector, and after taking over his parents’ house, 1 Holland Park in north Kensington, on his marriage in 1875, he proceeded to turn this conventional mid-Victorian mansion into one of the great Aesthetic houses of the day. The nearest parallel was the house in Prince’s Gate, which the Liverpool shipowner Frederick Leyland was currently decorating in comparable style with the help of many of the same artists. The conversion of 1 Holland Park was carried out by Philip Webb, the architect member of the Morris firm. William Morris himself was responsible for much of the decoration, while

Walter Crane devised an elaborate scheme of gesso work for the dining room, and Thomas Jeckyll, the begetter of Leyland’s ill-fated Peacock Room (now in the Freer Gallery, Washington, D.C.), designed the Japanese billiards room. In addition to paintings by Burne-Jones, Rossetti, Watts, Whistler, Legros, Fantin-Latour, and others, the house contained Greek vases, Tanagra statuettes, Persian pottery, Chinese porcelain, Japanese lacquer, bronzes, majolica, and tapestries. The whole assemblage illustrated the “harmony of complexity,” and had the “splendour of an old silk rug.”³

Alecco Ionides owned four works by Burne-Jones, all of moderate size and dating from about the same period. They hung in two drawing rooms on the first floor, where they formed an important element in a decorative scheme to which Morris gave a distinctly Persian flavor, emphasizing blues and greens and covering nearly every surface with delicate floral

patterns. He himself designed the carpet, wallpaper, curtains, and ceiling decoration. In one corner stood a grand piano designed by Burne-Jones and richly decorated in gesso by Kate Faulkner (Victoria and Albert Museum, London), while Chinese plates and Iznik tiles hung above the pictures and other rare ceramics were displayed in cabinets. It is conceivable that Burne-Jones altered the background of Ionides's version of *Pan and Psyche*, introducing green meadows and feathery trees, to make it harmonize better with its decorative setting. Any such decision, however, is unlikely to have been the outcome of Morris's involvement with the scheme, since he did not start work on the house until 1880, some years after the picture was probably finished.⁴

Ionides sold the picture a year before his death in 1898, and it passed, via Burne-Jones's dealers, Agnew's, into the possession of Robert Henry Benson (1850–1929). A financier whose name lives on in that of the banking house Kleinwort Benson, formed by merger in 1961, Benson had two mentors as a collector. One was his father-in-law, Robert Stayner Holford, the Maecenas of Dorchester House, who, with the aid of almost unlimited wealth, formed one of the greatest collections to be put together during the Victorian era. The other, in some ways more important, was Burne-Jones's patron William Graham, whose son, Rutherford, was Benson's contemporary at Balliol College, Oxford. Under Graham's influence, Benson concentrated on two closely related fields in which Graham himself had specialized, the work of the Italian Old Masters and that of Burne-Jones. In fact, a number of Benson's pictures of both kinds had once belonged to Graham, whose collection was sold in 1886. The exhibition includes one of these (cat. no. 113), as well as another Benson picture (cat. no. 119) which, like *Pan and Psyche*, does not have a Graham provenance. Benson's own collection was dispersed in the 1920s, both before and after his death in April 1929. His Italian Old Masters were bought en bloc in 1927 by Sir Joseph Duveen for £500,000. Duveen took them to America for sale, and many are now among the most prized possessions of the country's public collections. [JC]

1. *Memorials*, vol. 2, p. 333.

2. Letters in Houghton Library, Harvard University, quoted in Fogg Art Museum 1946, pp. 35–36.

3. Gleeson White, "An Epoch-Making House," *Studio* 12 (November 1897), pp. 111–12.

4. See *William Morris* (exh. cat., London: Victoria and Albert Museum, 1996), pp. 144–45, 153–54, nos. 1.16–18.

PROVENANCE: Bought from the artist by George Howard, 9th Earl of Carlisle; sold after the death of his widow, Rosalind, Countess of Carlisle, Sotheby's, June 10, 1922, lot 97, bought by Berisly for £980; bought by William Hesketh Lever, 1st Lord Leverhulme, from David Croal Thomson (Barbizon House), June 15, 1923, for £850, and presented to the Lady Lever Art Gallery before his death in 1925

EXHIBITED: Grosvenor Gallery, London, 1879, no. 166; New Gallery 1892–93, no. 32; New Gallery 1898–99, no. 86; Tate Gallery 1933, no. 18; Arts Council 1975–76, no. 136

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The Annunciation was often treated by Burne-Jones, as a subject for both easel paintings and decorative designs for stained glass, tiles, and mosaic. It embodied the picturesque aspect of the Christian religion—what he called "Christmas Carol Christianity"—that appealed to him so strongly, and he interpreted it in a wide variety of forms.¹ An altarpiece of 1860 (cat. no. 10) glows with the inner light of its gold ground and betrays the experience of copying Simone Martini's well-known version of the theme (1333; Galleria degli Uffizi, Florence) the previous year. A watercolor of 1863 (cat. no. 27), partly inspired by Carpaccio's *Dream of Saint Ursula* (1495; Accademia, Venice), pushes Pre-Raphaelite quaintness and eccentricity to the utmost limit. The present painting, completed sixteen years later, goes to the opposite extreme, and is the artist's most solemn and severe account of the subject. The Virgin is shown as Saint Luke describes her, "troubled" at the angel's awesome message, to which she will soon respond in the sonorous words of the Magnificat. That Burne-Jones had sketched a detail from Botticelli's *Madonna of the Magnificat* (1483; Galleria degli Uffizi) in 1859 is perhaps significant.² Certainly it is impossible to believe that he had not read Walter Pater's essay on the master, published in the *Fortnightly Review* in August 1870, in which the writer describes his hero's Madonnas as "dejected" by the "intolerable honour" of their destiny and "saddened perpetually by the shadow upon them of the great things from which they shrink."³ To emphasize the portentousness of the event and the weight of the burden that the Virgin accepts, Burne-Jones introduces reliefs of the Fall of Man and the Expulsion from Eden on the frieze above her head.

The picture was "designed and begun" in 1876, worked on in 1878, and finished in May 1879. It was then sent immediately to the Grosvenor Gallery, together with the Pygmalion series (cat. nos. 87a–d). The stylistic tendency of this group of works was very different from that of the two richly colored and romantic pictures he had shown the previous year, *Laus Veneris* (cat. no. 63) and *Le Chant d'Amour* (cat. no. 84). A colder, more academic and intellectual note is struck, while the glowing colors have given way to pale, chalky tones in the Pygmalion paintings and a somber, almost monochromatic palette in *The Annunciation*. The change is not really surprising. Whereas the two exhibits of 1878 had their origin in watercolors painted at

104.

The Annunciation

1876–79

Oil on canvas, 98½ x 41 in. (250 x 104.5 cm)

Signed and dated lower left: 18EBJ79

the height of the artist's Venetian phase in the early 1860s, the paintings shown in 1879 express the more Florentine impulse that had come to the fore later that decade and achieved maximum intensity in the wake of his visits to Italy in 1871 and 1873. *The Annunciation* was designed well after those formative journeys.

The model for the head of the Virgin was Julia Jackson (1846–1895), the daughter of one of the celebrated Pattle sisters and the mother of Virginia Woolf and the artist Vanessa Bell.⁴ She was a renowned beauty who often sat to the artists in the Little Holland House circle—G. F. Watts, her cousin Val Prinsep, and their aunt the photographer Julia Margaret Cameron, after whom she was named. Burne-Jones had probably known her, since he had stayed at Little Holland House, recovering from nervous prostration and receiving discreet tutelage from Watts, in 1858. In 1878 she had married, as her second husband, Leslie Stephen, the man of letters and leading agnostic who edited the *Cornhill Magazine* and later established the *Dictionary of National Biography*. Their daughter Vanessa was born May 30, 1879, and Penelope Fitzgerald describes Julia as appearing in *The Annunciation* “in all the grave beauty of early pregnancy.”⁵ It is an appealing idea, but we do not know exactly when she posed during the three years that the picture was on the easel.

Besides, Julia may not have been the only model. The Virgin's head has a distinct look of Georgie Burne-Jones, and she could well have influenced the conception. Just as Maria Zambaco, Burne-Jones's mistress, almost certainly posed for the head of Galatea, symbol of artistic inspiration, in the *Pygmalion* series, so the high-minded and morally courageous Georgie was a natural model for this supreme image of female virtue.

The Grosvenor exhibition of 1879 was the third at which Burne-Jones had asserted his claim to be the cynosure and talking point of the show. He was still capable of making hackles rise, but was gradually gaining acceptance. The *Illustrated London News* took the old line, claiming, “As regards the ‘Annunciation’ . . . for an artist of our day to pretend to be inspired by the ignorant pictures and to see with the untaught eyes of the painters of the fourteenth or the fifteenth century, is too absurd to bear reflection.”⁶ The *Builder*, too, was dismissive: “Of Mr. Jones's . . . painting of ‘The Annunciation’ we can only say that we cannot understand the motive for painting it.”⁷ The *Times*, on the other hand, thought the picture “a very fine example of its school—the revived Renaissance,”⁸ the *Portfolio* described it as “delightful,”⁹ and F. G. Stephens believed that it was “by far the most complete picture our artist has produced; the execution is more searching, the finish more thorough, the design has been more effectually carried out than in any former work of his.”¹⁰



Henry James was not so illuminating as usual; he thought Burne-Jones made “a less striking appearance” than in previous years, but that the pictures had “as much as ever the great merit . . . of having a great charm.”¹¹ Oscar Wilde pondered, a little fruitlessly, on how differently the subject would have been treated by Fra Angelico.¹²

A full-scale version (Castle Museum, Norwich), worked in bodycolor on the original cartoon, was painted in 1887 for Cyril Flower, Lord Battersea, possibly as a pendant to *The Golden Stairs* (cat. no. 109), which he already owned. It differs in a number of details, and the head of the Virgin is a likeness of the artist’s daughter, Margaret. There is also a small, undated version, with a much simplified background (British Museum, London).¹³ An engraving of the oil by Félix Jasinski was published in 1897. [JC]

1. For a comprehensive list, see Lady Lever Art Gallery collection 1994, pp. 12, 14 n. 10.
2. Both this copy and that after Simone Martini’s *Annunciation* are in the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge.
3. *Fortnightly Review*, August 14, 1870, pp. 157–58.
4. Sketches in sketchbook 962, Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge.
5. Fitzgerald 1975, p. 179.
6. *Illustrated London News*, May 3, 1879, p. 415.
7. *Builder* 37 (May 3, 1879), p. 481.
8. *Times* (London), May 2, 1879, p. 3.
9. *Portfolio*, 1879, p. 127.
10. *Athenaeum*, May 3, 1879, p. 575.
11. James 1956, p. 182.
12. Robert Ross, ed., *Works of Oscar Wilde* (London, 1909–), vol. 15, *Miscellanies*, p. 25.
13. British Museum collection 1994, p. 98, no. 70, illus.



105, front

105.

Apocrypha

1879

Printed book with vellum binding decorated in pen and ink, 13 x 10 in. (33 x 25.4 cm)

Inscribed on upper cover: SAPIENTIA / EGO IN ALTISSIMIS HABITAVI ET THRONVS MEVS IN COLVMNA NVBIS / AB INITIO ET ANTE SAECVLA CREATA SVM ET VSQUE AD FVTVRVM SAE CVLVM NON DESINAM / EGO MATER PVLCHRAE DILECTIONIS ET TIMORIS ET AGNITIONIS ET SANCTAE SPEI (I am the mother of fair love, and fear, and knowledge, and holy hope; Ecclesiasticus 24:18)

Inscribed on lower cover: DOMVS SAPIENTIAE / PULCHRA DILECTIO / TIMOR / AGNITIO / SANCTA SPES

Inscribed (in her own hand) on flyleaf: Frances Graham MDCCCLXXIX
PROVENANCE: Given by the artist to Frances Graham

EXHIBITED: New Gallery 1892–93, no. 164; Burlington Fine Arts Club 1899, p. 42, no. 1; Arts Council 1975–76, no. 211

Private collection

106.

Book of Common Prayer

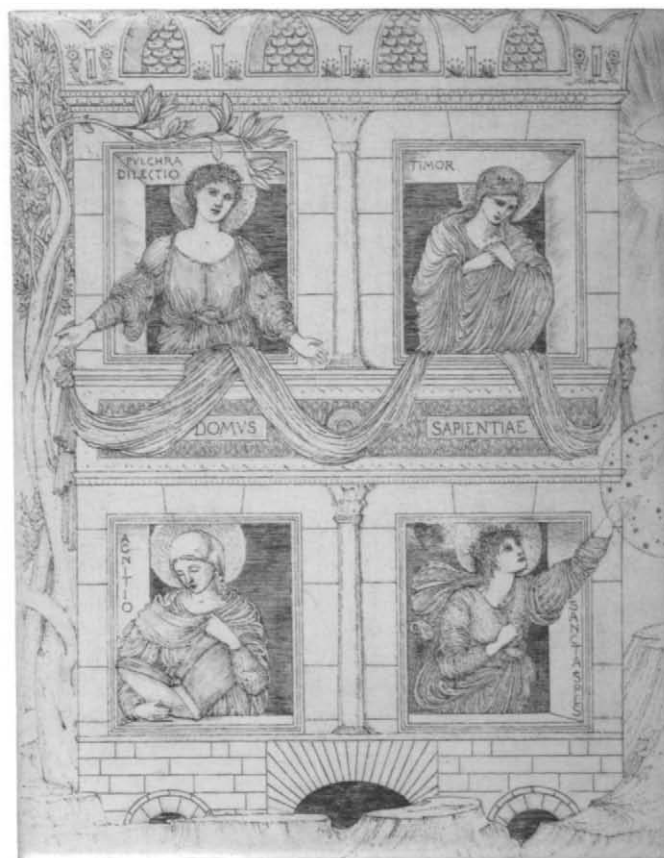
1880

Printed book with vellum binding decorated in pen and ink, 9 x 5½ in. (23 x 14 cm)

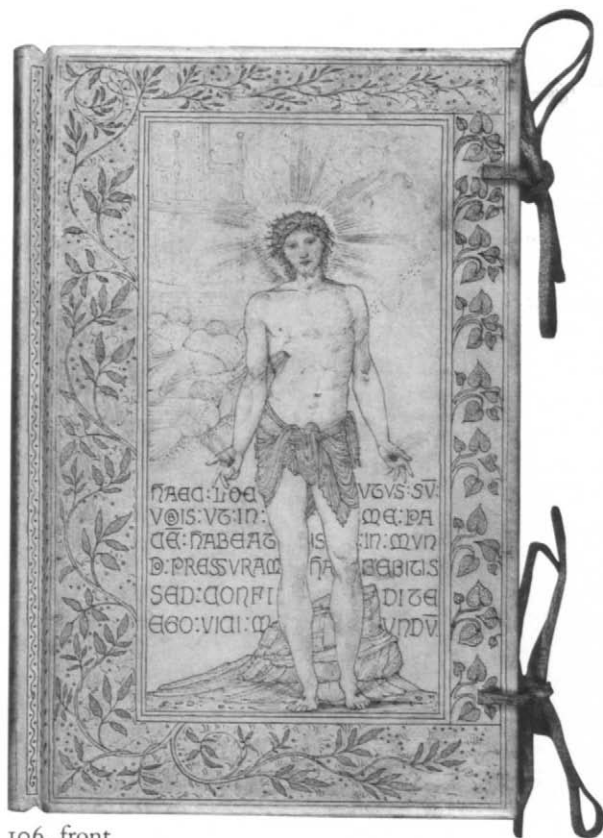
Inscribed (in her own hand) on flyleaf: Frances Graham Mar 28 1880; on lower cover: cecelia / catherina / magdalene / margarita / paradisus voluptatis

PROVENANCE: Given by the artist to Frances Graham

Private collection



105, back



106, front



106, back

Burne-Jones made several experiments in decorating the covers of books, partly in emulation of medieval book-binding, but also simply from his love of beautiful books, which he thought of as “little worlds all to themselves.”¹ He was pleased to give them away as tokens of appreciation for the affection shown to him by, for example, Frances, daughter of his patron William Graham, and other cultivated young women who shared his wide-ranging literary and aesthetic interests. These two decorated vellum bindings (of standard editions of texts) were gifts to Frances in 1879 and 1880; in the latter year he also gave to Mary Gladstone, daughter of the Prime Minister, an edition of Beethoven’s songs with a vellum cover painted with the figure of Orpheus.² Two additional painted vellum bindings, one for the Book of Psalms and another for the Apocrypha, were presented to Helen Gaskell probably in the early 1890s.³ About 1895, for his own copy of William Caxton’s 1485 edition of Malory’s *Morte d’Arthur*, he painted the heavy wooden boards of a white pigskin binding with scenes from the Quest for the Holy Grail—an abbreviated version of *The Summons* (cat. no. 145) on the front and a knight with the angel of the Sangreal on the back.⁴

In a letter to Ruskin of 1883, Burne-Jones comically bewailed Frances’s betrayal of his generosity by her marriage that year to John (later Sir John) Horner: “Many a patient design went to adoring Frances’ ways . . . Sirens for her girdle, Heavens and Paradises for her prayer-books, Virtues and Vices for her necklace-boxes—ah! the folly of me from the beginning—and now in the classic words of Mr. Swiveller ‘she has gone and married a market gardener.’ . . . And why didn’t

I make a girdle for *you*, and prayer-books, who would have really liked them.”⁵ Suitably for their female recipient, he decorated these two books with images of beautiful women, along with a representation of the Risen Christ on the upper cover of the prayer book. For the Apocrypha he avoided its deeper obscurities in favor of a depiction of Wisdom enthroned, expanding on the quotation from Ecclesiasticus to show her symbolic daughters on the lower cover. This is in keeping with his general approach to religious subjects (such as *The Star of Bethlehem*, cat. no. 141), which he explained to Frances: “To say truth there are only two sides of Christianity for which I am fitted by the spirit which designs in me—the carol part, and the Mystical part.”⁶ Both the composition of the daughters of Wisdom and the prayer book’s image of Paradise with musical saints employ a type of Mannerist celestial architecture, refined from stained-glass design, which appears often in the late work. There are several examples in the “*Secret*” *Book of Designs* (cat. no. 140), one of them translated into a chalk drawing of 1896 known as *Hymnum Gloriam Tuam Canimus*.⁷ This has another group of musical angels, atop a mysterious tower, who also appear in the large Creation subject from *The Beginning of the World*, designs begun for an illustrated edition of J. W. Mackail’s *Biblia Innocentium*, but left unfinished in 1898.⁸

1. Horner 1933, p. 117.

2. Burlington Fine Arts Club 1899, books, no. 5; sold at Sotheby’s, June 7, 1995, lot 153.

3. Sold at Sotheby’s Belgravia, March 23, 1981, lots 44, 45.

4. Shown at the Fifth Arts and Crafts Exhibition at the New Gallery in 1896, and now in the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford; Arts Council

1975–76, no. 223. It is probably what the bookbinder T. J. Cobden-Sanderson saw on a visit to the artist's studio on March 16, 1891: "An experiment in big binding with wooden boards, which fired me to do something big also!" (*The Journals of Thomas James Cobden-Sanderson, 1879–1922* [London, 1926], p. 301). It occurred to Cobden-Sanderson that "something beautiful in the way of decoration might be done with gold and silver nails and bosses"; since this is what the book now has, his collaboration is probable.

5. *Memorials*, vol. 2, pp. 130–31.

6. Letter of June 1886, quoted in Horner 1933, p. 112.

7. Sold at Sotheby's, June 23, 1981, lot 97.

8. The twenty-five designs made before the artist's death were cut on woodblock by Robert Catterson-Smith and published in 1902 (*The Beginning of the World: Twenty-five Pictures by Edward Burne-Jones*).

107.

Frances Graham

1879

Oil on canvas, 23½ x 17½ in. (59.7 x 44.5 cm)

Signed and dated lower left: EBJ 1879

PROVENANCE: Sir Kenneth Muir Mackenzie, the sitter's brother-in-law, 1898

EXHIBITED: New Gallery 1898–99, no. 192, as "A Portrait Sketch"

Private collection

NEW YORK ONLY



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Frances Graham was probably the most important woman in Burne-Jones's life after his wife (cat. no. 116), his daughter (cat. no. 117), and Maria Zambaco, the Greek beauty with whom he conducted a tempestuous affair in the late 1860s (cat. no. 49). She was certainly the most important of the young women with whom he enjoyed sentimental but platonic relationships in his later years. As for Frances Graham, in old age she described him as "my greatest friend for all my grown-up life," who "poured into my lucky lap all the treasures of one of the most wonderful minds that ever was created."¹

Born in 1858, Frances was the fourth of the eight children of Burne-Jones's staunchest and most sympathetic patron, William Graham (fig. 70). A wealthy India merchant and Liberal Member of Parliament for Glasgow, Graham was a passionate collector, focusing his attention on the early Italian masters and the two modern artists whom he recognized as their heirs, Dante Gabriel Rossetti and Burne-Jones. Frances shared his interests, and as soon as she was old enough she would accompany him on visits to painters' studios. In the late 1860s she frequently found herself at Rossetti's house in Cheyne Walk, Chelsea, so romantic and mysterious, and boasting a menagerie in the garden. Rossetti would read them his "House of Life" sonnets, soon to be published in his *Poems* of 1870, and in 1869, when Frances was eleven, he drew her as "The Lady of the Window" in Dante's *Vita Nuova*.²

Graham had been attracted to Burne-Jones's work as early as 1864, when he first saw it at the Old Water-Colour Society, and he had bought his first examples during the next few years

(see cat. nos. 30, 63). It was not, however, until about 1873, when she was fifteen, that her father took her to visit the artist at The Grange. At first, she tells us in her reminiscences, *Time Remembered* (1933), she "thought it rather dull" after the excitements of Cheyne Walk, but she soon changed her mind. Burne-Jones, she recalled,

was then a man of forty, just approaching his full fame, which he reached some ten or fifteen years later. . . . He generally came twice a week to our house [in Grosvenor Place, Belgravia] to dine, and his company was most fascinating. He had that acute and retentive memory that Lombroso says is characteristic of all great men, and no women. All the books he had ever read (and they were innumerable) remained clear and deeply cut in his memory, and could be drawn upon at will. Scott he read through every year, and Dickens he quoted continually. . . . It was wonderful to hear him talk of Italy, where he had been very little, and very seldom, but he could describe the cities and churches, and their treasures, as if his life had been spent there—as indeed his spiritual life was. He said to me once: "I was born in a little city of the Apennines, and my name was Edouardo della Francesca, but afterwards Buon Giorno, for the welcome that was given me."³

It would be easy to dismiss the relationship between the young girl and the “man of forty, just approaching his full fame” as a classic case of teenage infatuation, but there was more to it than that. Frances was not a great beauty; her features were rather heavy, as a friend perhaps recognized when, in an image inspired by her father’s collecting, he called her “the Botticelli.”⁴ But it was her strength of character, her intellectual curiosity, and her depth of sympathetic understanding that Burne-Jones appreciated. She was soon one of his closest confidants. Herbert Asquith, the future Prime Minister, whose son was to marry her daughter Katharine, wrote to her after the artist’s death in 1898: “I can hardly imagine anything that could tear a greater gap in your life or create such a breach between the future and the past. He gave you always of his best, and it must be some solace to you to remember that up to the end you above all others lightened and enriched his difficult life.”⁵

This haunting and mesmerizing portrait dates from 1879 and may well, like the Orpheus piano (cat. no. 125), have been commissioned by the sitter’s father to mark her twenty-first birthday. It seems to be connected with a mysterious reference in Burne-Jones’s work record for this year, “portrait of Frances Graham and her sister,” which was presumably a double portrait of Frances and Agnes. No such picture is known, and it is conceivable that the present picture is a fragment, salvaged by the artist from a larger canvas, with other parts of which he was dissatisfied. Whatever the case, it is the only known painted likeness of Frances by Burne-Jones. Other likenesses exist, the majority also dating from the late 1870s, but they are either pencil drawings or the heads of figures in subject pictures—the nymph on the extreme right in *The Call of Perseus* (cat. no. 88) and one of the damsels in *The Golden Stairs* (cat. no. 109).

[JC]

1. Horner 1933, pp. 16, 104.

2. Private collection; Virginia Surtees, *The Paintings and Drawings of Dante Gabriel Rossetti* (Oxford, 1971), vol. 1, p. 165, no. 318; Horner 1933, illus. facing p. 22.

3. Horner 1933, pp. 8, 104–5.

4. Abdy and Gere 1984, p. 128.

5. Horner 1933, pp. 110–11.

108.

Lady Frances Balfour

1881

Oil on canvas, 27½ x 15⅞ in. (70.1 x 39.5 cm)

PROVENANCE: *The sitter, and by descent to Lieutenant-Colonel Francis C. C. Balfour by 1949*

Musée des Beaux-Arts de Nantes (9046)

Lady Frances Balfour belonged to the highest ranks of the Scottish aristocracy. From an early age she knew the great political figures of her day, and her later involvement with

church politics brought her the friendship of archbishops. Passionately devoted to Scotland, she was imbued with the Whig principles and the ardent loyalty to the Kirk that were traditional in her family. With her acute mind and trenchant style of utterance she might well have been, in a more emancipated age, a political leader herself.

She was born in London in 1858, the tenth child of George Douglas Campbell, 8th Duke of Argyll, who for more than twenty years was a member of Gladstone’s cabinet. Her mother was the daughter of the 2d Duke of Sutherland, and her eldest brother, the Marquis of Lorne, married Queen Victoria’s sixth child, Princess Louise, in 1871. Much of her youth was spent at her family’s two great houses in the Scottish Highlands, Roseneath Castle, Dunbartonshire, and Inveraray Castle, Argyll. In childhood she suffered from a disease of the hip joint that caused her years of pain and left her with a permanent limp. Her most remarkable physical feature was her flaming red hair, a characteristic of the Campbell family.

In 1879 Frances married Eustace Balfour (1854–1911), a nephew of Robert Cecil, 3rd Marquess of Salisbury, who was leader of the Tory party and was to become Prime Minister in 1885, and the youngest brother of Arthur Balfour, a rising politician and amateur philosopher who was in due course to head a Conservative government himself. As pillars of the Tory establishment, Lowland Scots, connected with the Anglican Cecils, the Balfours embodied a set of values totally opposed to those of her own family. Nonetheless, the marriage was extremely happy.

Eustace Balfour had opted for a career as an architect, a choice that puzzled his philistine father. He had studied under Basil Champneys (1842–1935), and allied himself with the men who represented the architectural dimension of the Aesthetic movement—Philip Webb, Norman Shaw, and W. A. S. Benson. Despite, or perhaps because of, a nineteen-year difference in age, he had become a close friend of Burne-Jones, sharing with him the schoolboy humor that the artist never outgrew. Georgie records their visiting Brighton in 1877 (it was the occasion when Burne-Jones first set eyes on Rottingdean, where he was later to buy a house), noting that “together they visited the bazaar on the old chain-pier, and there fell in love with two owls which they brought back to London. Socrates and Eustacia we named them.”¹ Not perhaps the public image of the man who that same year emerged as the high priest of Aestheticism at the Grosvenor Gallery. Meanwhile, Eustace’s older brother Arthur had embarked on the more serious business of becoming Burne-Jones’s patron. In 1875 he had commissioned the Perseus series (cat. nos. 88–97) to adorn the music room at his London house, 4 Carlton Gardens (he was a passionate devotee of music, especially Handel), and in 1883 he would buy the definitive version of *The Wheel of Fortune* (cat. no. 52).

Frances sat to Burne-Jones for her portrait in 1881, two years after her marriage. She herself gives the date as 1880, but the picture, which is undated, is twice recorded in Burne-Jones’s



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own work list for the following year. She originally wanted Eustace to be painted, perhaps because W. A. S. Benson, who had trained with him in Basil Champneys's office, was currently sitting to the artist for his portrait. However, as she recorded, when she sent Eustace to make the arrangements, he

came back having arranged that I should sit. This was not at all to my liking or my intention, for I was wretchedly *farouche* in my new life and surroundings. However, it was arranged and there was nothing to do but submit with grace and to hope that when B. J. had done my portrait, the gifted artist would turn his thoughts and his brush on to Eustace.

The sittings were many. Eustace was in attendance, and when the artist was weary of talk, he read aloud from *Cranford*. We all knew that work, and B. J.'s appreciation of its perfect humour was delightful to see. I think he worked slowly, and at times talked in a manner which made his brush idle.²

The portrait captures something of Frances's "farouche" frame of mind at the time, her shyness, insecurity, painful awareness of her crippled leg, and jealousy of her independence. The picture was not exhibited during the lifetime of the artist or his sitter.

[JC]

1. *Memorials*, vol. 2, p. 81.

2. Lady Frances Balfour, *Ne Obliviscaris* (London, 1930), vol. 1, p. 223. Mrs. Gaskell's novel *Cranford* had been published in 1853.

109.

The Golden Stairs

1876–80

Oil on canvas, 109 x 46 in. (269.2 x 116.8 cm)

Signed and dated lower left: EBJ 1880

PROVENANCE: Bought from the artist by Cyril Flower, Lord Battersea; bequeathed by him to the Tate Gallery in 1907 and presented by Lady Battersea in 1924

EXHIBITED: Grosvenor Gallery, London, 1880, no. 120; New Gallery 1892–93, no. 51; New Gallery 1898–99, no. 108; Arts Council 1975–76, no. 138; Tate Gallery 1997–98, no. 68

Tate Gallery, London (N04005)

BIRMINGHAM AND PARIS

Like so many of Burne-Jones's later works, *The Golden Stairs* was designed in 1872 in the great spurt of creative activity that followed his visit to Italy the previous year. The canvas itself was begun in 1876, the same year as *The Annunciation* (cat. no. 104) and *The Garden of Pan* (cat. no. 120), and was shown at the Grosvenor Gallery in 1880. It was Burne-Jones's only contribution that year, and was completed under great pressure. On April 22, only a few days before the opening, Georgie recorded in her diary: "The picture is finished, and so is the painter almost. He never was so pushed for time in his life." It shows, however, no signs of haste, each detail being handled with his usual care.

The picture is still in the pale and restricted palette that had characterized Burne-Jones's contributions the previous year, *The Annunciation* and the Pygmalion series (cat. nos. 87a–d). If anything, the classical and academic tendency, also found in the preparatory drawings (cat. no. 110), has intensified, and it may have been even more pronounced at an earlier stage of the picture's development. F. G. Stephens, who knew Burne-Jones and had evidently watched it in progress, commented in his review of the Grosvenor exhibition: "Since we first saw this picture it has lost much of the Greek quality we then admired. . . . It has . . . been modified, and now resembles in many points the art of Piero della Francesca. The pale golden carnations [i.e., flesh tones], the broad foreheads, the deep-set, narrow eyes and their fixed look, even the general contours and the poising of the heads on the shoulders, plainly tell of the influence of that lovely painter and poetic designer." Piero (ca. 1420–1492) was still a minority interest at this date, but Burne-Jones had developed a great feeling for him and had copied some of his frescoes in the Church of San Francesco at Arezzo in 1871. Stephens's observation may well reflect a declaration on his part that *The Golden Stairs* was a form of homage to the early Renaissance master.

The picture brings to a head much that had been implicit in Burne-Jones's work for many years. It is a "subjectless" composition of the type that had been fashionable in the 1860s, when he had painted a notable example, *Green Summer* (fig. 63). It is significant that two other titles—"The King's Wedding" and "Music on the Stairs"—were considered before "The Golden Stairs" was chosen. Again like *Green Summer* and other Aesthetic works of the 1860s and 1870s, the picture is a color harmony, in this case a "harmony in white." Many critics commented on this at the time, praising "the subtly-managed variations of white in the dresses," or the figures "all in silvery greyish-white and its allied tints," having "the exquisite varieties . . . of tarnished and lustrous silver, in purplish pearly hues and purest greys."³ Even a satirical account of the picture in the magazine *Vanity Fair*, in which the finely pleated dresses worn by the girls were described as "tin-foil night-gowns,"⁴ touches obliquely on this carefully constructed color harmony. Characteristic, too, of Aestheticism are the references to music, not only overt in the musical instruments held by the figures, who seem to have been playing in an upper room and

will soon re-form their orchestra in a lower chamber, but more subtly in the harmonious movement of the musicians themselves. "The feet," a critic observed, "seem to fall in rhythmic harmony, and the faces are full of breathing music."⁵

But it is also typical of Burne-Jones that he uses music not, like Whistler in his musical titles, to emphasize the formal and abstract nature of his art, but to create mood and introduce an element of symbolism. Indeed, *The Golden Stairs* is the supreme example of a picture in which he deliberately evokes a sense of mystery and ambiguity, qualities that were to be central to European Symbolism a decade or more later. F. G. Stephens put his finger on the point when he observed that the figures "troop past like spirits in an enchanted dream. . . . What is the place they have left, why they pass before us thus, whither they go, who they are, there is nothing to tell."⁶ Another critic, who had made up his mind that the picture represented "a band of maiden minstrels leaving a marriage feast" (perhaps having got wind of the other titles the artist had considered), observed with a touch of irritation that "without such motive it is difficult to understand [the picture's] *raison d'être*. Yet authorities who might seem to be in the painter's confidence declare that no such meaning was intended—that the maiden minstrels . . . are there for no reason in particular, and their expressions mean nothing in particular: if they are pleasant to look upon, that is all the artist's business. 'Art for art's sake' is the shallow fallacy of this new criticism."⁷

To an audience which believed that "every picture tells a story," which expected paintings to have a specific literary or narrative program, or even, if they knew their Ruskin, to be replete with moral and symbolic significance, this conscious cultivation of ambiguity was genuinely puzzling. "Many were the letters," wrote Lady Burne-Jones, that the artist "received from different parts of the world, asking for an 'explanation' of 'The Golden Stairs.'" Indeed he himself, he told a correspondent, sometimes wondered why he had started a picture, "and what I meant." All he could say for certain was that when it was finished, "he wanted everyone to see in it what they could for themselves. He was often amused by the anxiety people had to be told what they ought to think about his pictures as well as by their determination to find a deep meaning in every line he drew."⁸

Despite these and other reservations, there was a strong feeling that *The Golden Stairs* was Burne-Jones's greatest achievement to date, or, as Stephens put it, "beyond all question the painter's masterpiece."⁹ Critics particularly welcomed the advent of what the *Illustrated London News* called a "healthier tone" than they had found in *Laus Veneris* (cat. no. 63) and other works a year or two earlier. "The expressions," this writer continued, "though melancholy, do not . . . indicate morbid or love-lorn emaciation." Even the sympathetic Stephens was glad to see the end of "false archaisms of sentiment," while the *Times* believed that the faces, far from showing "questionable" feeling or "veiled and exhausted passion," were "among the most beautiful that the master has painted,



sad rather than joyous, but with a sadness that is tender and pleasing, not woeful and worn out."¹⁰

Although the figures were studied from professional models such as Antonia Caiva and Bessie Keene, both of whom worked for Burne-Jones for many years (cat. no. 110), many of the heads are likenesses of girls in the artist's family or circle. As late as the beginning of 1880 he was asking his friend George Howard to suggest "a nice innocent damsel or two" to fill up "the staircase picture."¹¹ Burne-Jones's daughter, Margaret, stands in profile at the top of the stairs, while William Morris's younger daughter May faces the spectator about two-thirds the way down. Frances Graham, the daughter of Burne-Jones's patron William Graham (cat. no. 107), is seen moving out of the picture at the lower left, holding cymbals, while behind her is her close friend Mary Gladstone, the daughter of W. E. Gladstone, leader of the Liberal party, who became Prime Minister for the second time that year. Others who are said to appear include Laura Tennant (later Lyttelton), a fascinating girl whose death in childbirth in 1886 inspired Burne-Jones to produce a relief sculpture in her memory (fig. 100); Mary Stuart Wortley, later Lady Lovelace, who became an artist herself and whose cousin, Lord Wharncliffe, bought Burne-Jones's *King Cophetua and the Beggar Maid* (cat. no. 112); and Edith Gellibrand, an actress who performed under the stage name Edith Chester. Ironically, the trouble Burne-Jones took to vary the faces seems to have been lost on the critics, more than one of whom complained that the heads all looked as if they had been taken from the same model.¹²

Of all Burne-Jones's pictures to be exhibited at the Grosvenor, *The Golden Stairs* probably did most to determine popular perceptions of the Aesthetic movement. It is often said to have been a source of inspiration for Gilbert and Sullivan's comic opera *Patience*, which satirizes the sillier aspects of the movement and was first performed in 1881. The fact that so many fashionable or well-connected young women associated with the artist figure in the painting may have helped to

give it a certain contemporary relevance. Their appearance as models was not revealed in any of the extensive press coverage, but must have been well known to habitués of the Grosvenor and those who kept abreast of such matters. The picture was much reproduced. Frederick Hollyer issued photographs of many of the preparatory studies, and an engraving by Félix Jasinski was published by Arthur Tooth in London and New York in 1894.

The picture was bought by Cyril Flower (1843–1907), later Lord Battersea. In 1877 he had married Constance Rothschild, a first cousin and close friend of Blanche Lindsay, whose husband, Sir Coutts Lindsay, owned the Grosvenor Gallery. A man of glamorous good looks, Flower belonged, like so many of Burne-Jones's patrons, to the Liberal establishment. He entered Parliament in 1880, and served Gladstone as Whip until he was raised to the peerage in 1892. In 1879 he and Constance had taken Surrey House, a venerable mansion on the corner of Oxford Street and the Edgware Road, as their London residence, and there they built up a fine collection and entertained political and artistic society on a lavish scale. *The Golden Stairs* must have been one of the first pictures they bought for their palatial home.

[JC]

1. *Memorials*, vol. 2, p. 103.
2. *Athenaeum*, May 8, 1880, p. 605.
3. *Times* (London), May 1, 1880, p. 8; *Athenaeum*, May 8, 1880, p. 605.
4. *Vanity Fair*, May 15, 1880, p. 277.
5. *Times* (London), May 1, 1880, p. 8.
6. *Athenaeum*, May 8, 1880, p. 605.
7. *Illustrated London News*, May 8, 1880, p. 451.
8. *Memorials*, vol. 1, p. 297.
9. *Athenaeum*, April 3, 1880, p. 448.
10. *Illustrated London News*, May 8, 1880, p. 451; *Athenaeum*, April 3, 1880, p. 448; *Times* (London), May 1, 1880, p. 8.
11. Fitzgerald 1975, p. 183.
12. The identity of the girls who modeled for the picture will be the subject of a forthcoming article by Anne Anderson, whose help is gratefully acknowledged.

IIO.

Study for "The Golden Stairs"

1877

Silverpoint heightened with white on gray prepared paper, 12¾ x 6¼ in. (32.5 x 15.9 cm)

Inscribed lower left: ANTONIA/EBJ/1877/TO HMG

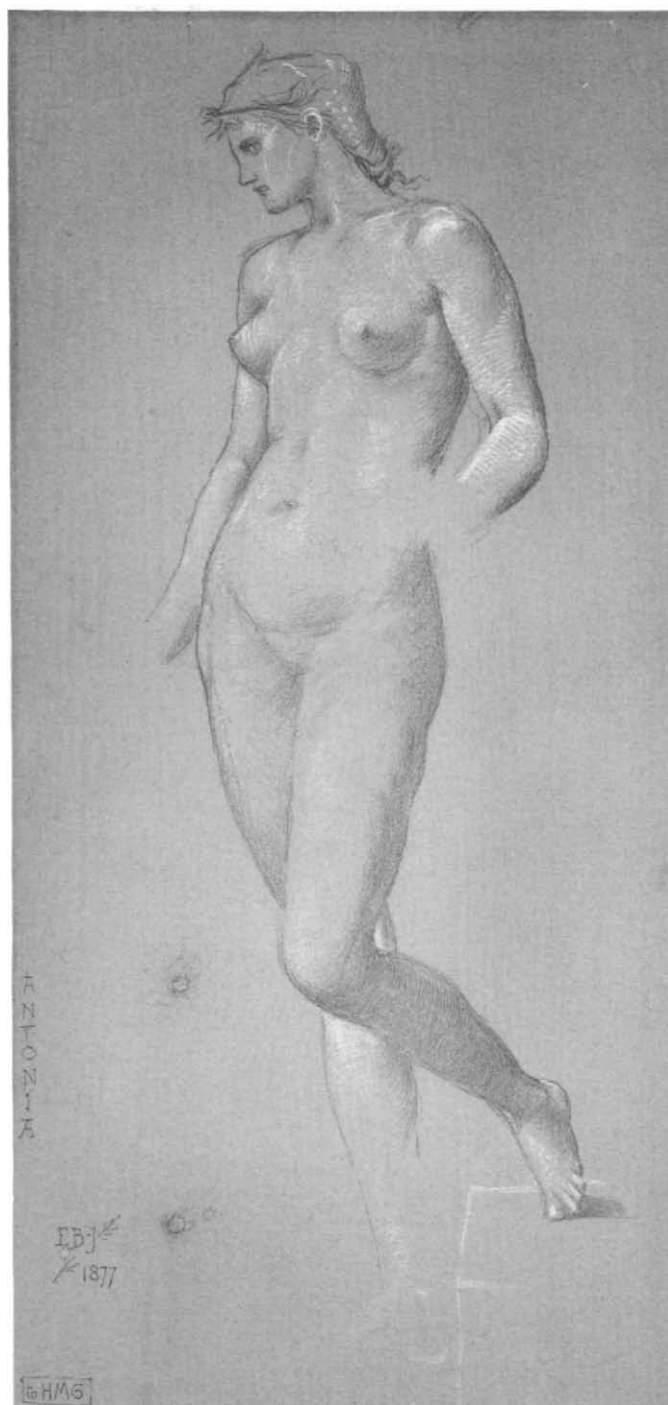
PROVENANCE: Given by the artist to Helen Mary Gaskell and presented by her to the Ashmolean Museum in 1939 in anticipation of a bequest

EXHIBITED: Burlington Fine Arts Club 1899, no. 72; Tate Gallery 1933, no. 82; Arts Council 1975–76, no. 139

The Visitors of the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford (1939.15)

BIRMINGHAM AND PARIS

Ever since Burne-Jones had set out to improve his drawing in the mid-1860s, he had adopted the traditional academic practice of making nude studies for his figures. The present example belongs to a group executed in connection with *The*



IIO

Golden Stairs (cat. no. 109), which are in a technique inspired by that of Florentine drawings of the Quattrocento.¹ At the height of his Florentine phase, in the early 1870s, Burne-Jones eagerly collected photographs of such drawings, no doubt acquiring many during his visits to Italy in 1871 and 1873, but also asking friends who were traveling there, such as Charles Eliot Norton and Charles Fairfax Murray, to buy them for him. Many were published by the well-known Florentine firm of Alinari, established in 1852. Drawings of the type he is imitating here also figure prominently among those described by another friend, Algernon Charles Swinburne, in his article "Notes on Designs of the Old Masters at Florence," published

in the *Fortnightly Review* in 1868. They include the drawing of a witch by Filippino Lippi, to which Swinburne compares Burne-Jones's early watercolor *Sidonia von Bork* (cat. no. 12).

Burne-Jones more or less abandoned the technique after this experiment, although he was to attempt something similar at the end of his life, in a distinctive group of drawings in body-color and metallic paint on colored grounds (cat. nos. 164–167). Certainly he did not use it for the many other studies—of drapery, hands, feet, and musical instruments—that exist for *The Golden Stairs*. These are invariably in hard pencil on white paper.

While the heads in the painting were based on girls in the artist's family and circle, the nude studies for the figures would have been made from a professional model; and almost uniquely in the case of the present drawing, we know her name. The "Antonia" of the inscription was Antonia Caiva, one of the most popular of the Italian models so much employed in the studios of Victorian artists. She sat also to Burne-Jones's brother-in-law Edward Poynter and Poynter's fellow classicist Frederic Leighton, who was elected President of the Royal Academy in 1878. Poynter painted her as Andromeda in one of four large decorative canvases that he executed in the 1870s for the billiards room at Wortley Hall, the Yorkshire seat of the Earl of Wharnccliffe, who was to buy Burne-Jones's *King Cophetua and the Beggar Maid* (cat. no. 112) in 1884.² According to Burne-Jones she was "like Eve and Semiramis, but if she had a mind at all, which I always doubted, it had no ideas. She had splendour and solemnity: her glory lasted nearly ten years." Later she fell on hard times. Burne-Jones received a pathetic note from her in hospital, ill-spelt and ill-written: "Sir, I was always obedient to you. I am poor and ill."³ Then she disappears from view.

The drawing was one of a number that were given to the Ashmolean by Helen Mary Gaskell, the last of the young women with whom Burne-Jones enjoyed sentimental but platonic relationships in later life (fig. 90). Twenty-five years his junior, delicate, ethereal, and hungry for aesthetic experience, she was married to a soldier, Captain Gaskell of the Ninth Lancers, and had two children, the older of whom, Amy, sat to Burne-Jones for her portrait in 1893.⁴ Helen Mary had been introduced to the artist by another of his Egerias, Frances Horner (cat. no. 107), the previous year, and he was soon writing her as many as five or six letters a day, claiming that she had "reached the well of loneliness that is in me" and given him the strength to continue painting despite the depression and physical illness that assailed him in these later years. Her letters to him were scrupulously destroyed by the recipient, but his to her survive. The relationship is described by Penelope Fitzgerald, who comments that Mrs. Gaskell "must have been a tactful woman. She managed a difficult situation extremely well."⁵

[JC]

1. Three more of these drawings are in the National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne (acc. nos. 286/2–288/2). See *The Pre-Raphaelites and Their Circle in the National Gallery of Victoria* (Melbourne, 1978), pp. 38–39, nos. 17–19, illus.

2. A fine head study for the figure is in the British Museum, London; William Gaunt, *Victorian Olympus* (London, 1952), illus. facing p. 128.
3. T. M. Rooke's notes, quoted in Fitzgerald 1975, pp. 82–83.
4. The portrait was sold with other Burne-Jones items from the Gaskell collection at Sotheby's Belgravia, March 23, 1981, lot 27, illus.
5. Fitzgerald 1975, pp. 238ff.

III.

The Mill

1870–82

Oil on canvas, 36¼ x 77½ in. (90.8 x 197.5 cm)

Signed and dated at right: EBJ/1870

PROVENANCE: Bought from the artist by Constantine Alexander Ionides and bequeathed by him to the Victoria and Albert Museum in 1901

EXHIBITED: Grosvenor Gallery, London, 1882, no. 175; New Gallery 1892–93, no. 46; New Gallery 1898–99, no. 102

Victoria and Albert Museum, London. Ionides Bequest (CA18)

NEW YORK AND BIRMINGHAM

Having failed to exhibit at the Grosvenor Gallery in 1881, Burne-Jones returned in force in 1882, showing a total of nine works. *The Mill* was probably the most important, although *The Tree of Forgiveness* (cat. no. 114) and *The Feast of Peleus* (cat. no. 51) were also shown that year. The picture marks a return to a romantic and coloristic style after the severe, classical manner, chalky or almost monochromatic in tone, that he had adopted in recent years for such pictures as the Pygmalion series (cat. nos. 87a–d) and *The Annunciation* (cat. no. 104), both exhibited in 1879, and *The Golden Stairs* (cat. no. 109), which had followed in 1880. Indeed, this classical tendency persists in *The Tree of Forgiveness*, with its restricted palette and Michelangelesque nudes; and anyone comparing the picture with *The Mill* in 1882 might well have wondered if the artist was not in the grip of a stylistic identity crisis. The dilemma, stemming from earlier phases of ardent response to both Venetian and Florentine painting, was not to be resolved until he exhibited *King Cophetua and the Beggar Maid* (cat. no. 112) in 1884 and the first of the Perseus series in 1887–88.

The Mill was started in 1870 (the date it bears) and worked on intermittently for twelve years. According to Burne-Jones's work record, it received attention in 1873, 1878, 1879, and 1881, and it was finished only shortly before its exhibition. Like so many of Burne-Jones's pictures, including the stylistically very different *Golden Stairs*, *The Mill* has no specific subject, the artist seeking rather to evoke a mood with the aid of music to set the emotional tone and give the composition its *raison d'être*. While this tendency has many parallels within the context of the Aesthetic movement, notably with Walter Pater's famous dictum that "all art constantly aspires towards the condition of music" and Whistler's habit of giving his pictures musical titles, Burne-Jones's references to music are more literal than Whistler's and clearly introduce an element of

symbolism. In fact, the particular mood he evokes in *The Mill*—that blend of tension, nostalgia, and regret inherent in a summer's evening as the shadows of twilight lengthen—was one that appealed to many Symbolist painters. Perhaps the obvious example is *Memories* (fig. 39), the masterpiece by Burne-Jones's Belgian friend Fernand Khnopff that was exhibited in London in 1890; but certain early works by Alphonse Osbert (1857–1939) and Henri Le Sidaner (1862–1939) also come to mind.

The picture's lack of narrative content struck many who reviewed the Grosvenor exhibition. For F. G. Stephens, writing in the *Athenaeum*, it was a "sumptuous and half-mystical idyll."¹ "It is hardly a picture that can be analysed, . . ." wrote the art critic of the *Times*. "It is a work which has no counterpart in the actually existing order of things, but reflects its truth only from certain mental states, and so is true to feeling, though not to fact."² Henry James, in an article in the *Atlantic Monthly*, observed that its title seemed to have been chosen "simply . . . to give it a label of some kind. . . . It represents—but such a beginning is rash, for it would by no means be easy to say what it represents. Suffice it that three very pretty young women . . . are slowly dancing together in a little green garden, on the edge of a mill-pond. . . . I have not the least idea who the young women are, nor what period of history, what time and place, the painter has had in his mind." Like the *Times*'s critic, James recognized that the picture's real subject is a mental state, or perhaps rather a philosophical standpoint. "A whole range of feeling about life is expressed in Mr. Burne-Jones's productions. . . . His expression is complicated, troubled; but at least there is an interesting mind in it."³ This fundamental truth, he felt, made much of the controversy about Burne-Jones essentially beside the point, and William Morris agreed. "I recollect," wrote the critic J. E. Phythian, "asking Morris . . . what Burne-Jones meant by [*The Mill*]. I got for answer something not much more articulate than a grunt."⁴

The picture is not one of Burne-Jones's most overtly Italianate works, although some have seen it in this light. Henry James returns to the point time and again; the dancers wear "old Italian dresses," the picture in general is "an echo of early Italianism" and "impregnated with the love of Italy." When F. G. Stephens saw the picture again in the artist's retrospective exhibition at the New Gallery in the winter of 1892–93, he commented that the dancers were moving "with the robust grace of Signorelli."⁵ But perhaps the most Italianate feature is the group of nude men bathing. They seem to echo figures in works by two artists whom Burne-Jones is known to have admired: Piero della Francesca's *Baptism of Christ* (1450s), which had entered the National Gallery, London, in 1861, and Michelangelo's famous composition *The Battle of Cascina* (1504), which he would have known through Marcantonio's engravings.

The Mill is Burne-Jones's most elaborate expression of a motif that haunted his imagination, that of a group of buildings—whether warehouses, mills, locks, or water gates—on a stretch of river. It seems likely that the attraction this had for him originated in the "terminal pilgrimages" to the burial place of Fair Rosamund at Godstowe which he made as an undergraduate at Oxford in the mid-1850s, locks being a feature of that part of the upper Thames along which he would have walked.⁶ Certainly the motif first occurs in one of the illustrations to Archibald Maclaren's *Fairy Family*, which he made about the time he left Oxford in 1856 (cat. nos. 1–3). It reappears in *The Wise and Foolish Virgins*, a pen-and-ink drawing of 1859 (cat. no. 8); and then on a number of subsequent occasions, notably in *The Mill* and two works dating from the end of his career, *Aurora* (Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane), which was exhibited at the New Gallery in 1896, and one of the murals he painted to amuse his grandchildren in the nursery of his house at Rottingdean.⁷ The fact that the background of *Aurora* was based on a sketch of a canal made during a family



holiday in Oxford in 1867 tends to confirm that the city's waterways inspired Burne-Jones's general interest in the theme, and there are two interesting parallels that underline the point yet again. One is the series of landscapes which G. P. Boyce, his fellow artist and patron, painted in the late 1850s and early 1860s at such Thames-side villages as Streatley, Mapledurham, and Godstowe, the last of which we know he actually visited with Burne-Jones in March 1859.⁸ The other parallel is provided by Burne-Jones's friend and follower J. R. Spencer Stanhope. He too made a feature of the lock or water-gate motif on a number of occasions,⁹ and, like Burne-Jones, he was familiar with the Oxford countryside, having been an undergraduate at Christ Church as well as having contributed to the Oxford Union murals in 1857–58.

The Mill was bought by Constantine Ionides, the autocratic head of the large naturalized Greek family that, together with their many relatives and associates in the wider Anglo-Greek community, played such an important part in London's cultural life during the later nineteenth century. The tradition of patronage and involvement with the arts established by his father, Alexander, was followed by Constantine himself and his four younger brothers and sisters: Aglaia, Mrs. Coronio, who often helped Burne-Jones with dresses for his models and was a confidante of William Morris; Luke, a man whose private and professional life were often in turmoil but who was Burne-Jones's intimate friend; Alexander, who shared Constantine's passion for collecting and created one of the great Aesthetic interiors of the day (see cat. no. 103); and Chariclea, who married the musician Edward Dannreuther and supported him in promoting the work of Richard Wagner in England.

Constantine, a wealthy stockbroker with a large house in Holland Villas Road, Kensington, formed a highly personal collection in the 1870s and 1880s and, by bequeathing it to the South Kensington (now Victoria and Albert) Museum on his death in 1901, ensured that, alone among the great collections formed in England during the Aesthetic period, it remains intact to this day. As well as major examples of Delacroix, Corot, Millet, Degas, Rossetti, Legros, and many others, it includes several works by Burne-Jones, of which *The Mill* is the most important. It was said in the family that the three dancing figures represented Aglaia Coronio, her cousin Maria Zambaco (cat. no. 49), and their close friend Marie Spartali (see cat. no. 121), a triumvirate of talent and beauty known throughout their circle as "the Three Graces." Constantine strongly disapproved when Burne-Jones conducted a tempestuous affair with Maria Zambaco in the late 1860s, though his patronage survived the strain this placed on their relationship.

An etching of *The Mill* by Émile Sulpis (1856–1943) was published in 1899.¹⁰ [JC]

1. *Athenaeum* (May 6, 1882), p. 575.
2. *Times* (London), May 8, 1882, p. 5.
3. James 1956, pp. 205–8.
4. Phythian 1908, p. 121.

5. *Athenaeum* (January 28, 1893), p. 128.

6. See *Memorials*, vol. 1, p. 97.

7. Reproduced respectively in Robin Ironside and John Gere, *Pre-Raphaelite Painters* (London, 1948), pl. 83, and Barbican Art Gallery 1989, p. 81.

8. See *George Price Boyce* (exh. cat., London: Tate Gallery, 1987), nos. 24–30, and Surtees 1980, p. 26, entry for March 6, 1859.

9. *Fine Victorian Pictures, Drawings, and Watercolours*, Christie's, November 13, 1992, note to lot 120 (*Our Lady of the Water-Gate*, by Stanhope).

10. Hartnoll 1988, pl. 10.

II2.

King Cophetua and the Beggar Maid

1880–84

Oil on canvas, 112 $\frac{1}{4}$ x 53 $\frac{1}{2}$ in. (290 x 136 cm)

Signed and dated: EBJ 1884

PROVENANCE: *The Earl of Wharnccliffe*; purchased from his executors by subscribers to the Burne-Jones Memorial Fund, 1900

EXHIBITED: Grosvenor Gallery, London, 1884, no. 69; Exposition Universelle, Paris, 1889; New Gallery 1892–93, no. 62; New Gallery 1898–99, no. 98; Arts Council 1975–76, no. 146

Trustees of the Tate Gallery, London (N01771)

BIRMINGHAM AND PARIS

II3.

King Cophetua and the Beggar Maid

ca. 1883

Bodycolor and colored chalks, 112 $\frac{1}{4}$ x 52 in. (290 x 132 cm)

PROVENANCE: William Graham (sold 1886); presented by Colonel Rex Benson through the National Art-Collections Fund, 1947

EXHIBITED: *Monet to Freud* (National Art-Collections Fund), Sotheby's, London, 1985–86, no. 12

Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery (1947P18)

NEW YORK AND BIRMINGHAM

The subject of one of the artist's most famous paintings comes from an Elizabethan ballad in Thomas Percy's *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* (1765) and used by Tennyson for a poem of sixteen lines, "The Beggar Maid," published in 1842. Burne-Jones made a first, unsatisfactory attempt at an oil in 1861–62 (Tate Gallery, London) and seems to have taken up the idea again with designs in a sketchbook datable to about 1875.¹ Two watercolors (one originally dated 1883) show further resolution of the composition, but have the figures close together, with the beggar maid looking away shyly; in both, the choristers are singing lustily.² Work on the final canvas took up most of the winter of 1883–84; as was his custom, Burne-Jones made a cartoon (cat. no. 113), on which he could simultaneously work out matters of detail and color. This shows some interesting changes, such as the virtual elimination of the strong sunlight streaming in from the left, Burne-Jones choosing in

the oil to darken the interior space and use the beggar maid's pale skin as a focus of lightness.

According to the ballad, the king shared Pygmalion's view of women—"He carèd not for women-kinde, / But did them all disdaine"—but fell in love at first sight with a beautiful young beggar "all in gray / The which did cause his paine." Tennyson simply describes their meeting, ending his poem with Cophetua's oath, "This beggar maid shall be my queen!" while Burne-Jones seems to illustrate a passage in the older narrative, in which the beggar (identified as Penelephon) sits speechless in awe within the royal palace:

The king with courteous comly talke
This beggar doth imbrace:
The beggar blusheth scarlet red,
And straight again as pale as leade,
But not a word at all she said,
She was in such amaze.

Even the young attendant singers, who provide a foil to the immobility of the main figures, are engrossed and silent, enhancing the impression of timelessness, of a moment frozen within an atmosphere of unspoken romantic feeling.

The influence on the composition of Andrea Mantegna's *Madonna della Vittoria* (1495–96; Musée du Louvre, Paris) has been noted, as well as that of Carlo Crivelli's *Annunciation* of 1496 (which Burne-Jones would have seen at the National Gallery), and here a similar use of heavily foreshortened planes, gradually receding upward through a rather implausible architectural space, is cleverly disguised with a variety of cloths, shadows, and exotic decorative details of a vaguely Assyrian kind (in the ballad, Cophetua is called African, giving Burne-Jones the opportunity to offset his dark skin against Penelephon's white limbs). The passage in the immediate foreground, showing the near-abstract reflections of the sculpted reliefs, may be compared to similar work in *Pygmalion and the Image* (cat. no. 87a). A distant crepuscular landscape glimpsed through the upper door not only affords an ingenious secondary light source but acts also as a reminder of the outside world from which the beggar maid has come, both appearing in simple, refreshing contrast to the king's opulent surroundings. The beggar maid holds a bunch of anemones, symbol of unrequited (here, perhaps unsought) love, underlining the emotional tension of the scene.

Burne-Jones encountered some difficulties during his long winter of work on the painting. He worried especially over the girl's dress; several drapery studies, including two in oil and chalk of the full figure,³ testify to his indecisiveness, described in a letter of November 1883 about whether "to put on the Beggar Maid a sufficiently beggarly coat, that will not look unappetizing to King Cophetua,—that I hope has been achieved, so that she shall look as if she deserved to have it made of cloth of gold and set with pearls. I hope the king kept the old one and looked at it now and then."⁴ For the figure of the king there is a superb large life study from the nude model,

now at Birmingham.⁵ Cophetua's shield and crown (the latter used also in the Briar Rose series [cat. nos. 55–58] and *The Sleep of Arthur in Avalon* [fig. 107]) were painted from actual pieces of metalwork, made to the artist's design by W. A. S. Benson.⁶ Despite the demands of other work, as well as more welcome interruption—Henry James took John Singer Sargent to see its progress⁷—the painting was finally finished in the spring of 1884, Burne-Jones writing to his friend Madeleine Wyndham on April 23: "This very hour I have ended my work on my picture. I am very tired of it—I can see nothing any more in it, I have stared it out of all countenance and it has no word for me. It is like a child that one watches without ceasing till it grows up, and lo! It is a stranger."⁸

All his effort was repaid, however, by the picture's success at the Grosvenor Gallery exhibition in 1884, where, in Malcolm Bell's words, it "assured finally the painter's claim to the highest place in English art, and convinced even the most obstinate carpers of his unequalled powers."⁹ The *Art Journal* praised the "glowing eastern colour" of the undoubted "picture of the year." "It is the idea," its critic concluded, "the inspiration of this picture which makes it so fine, and raises it to the level of the work of the great masters of a bye-gone age."¹⁰ F. G. Stephens, writing in the *Athenaeum*, also admired the artist's command of color: "The whole of this magnificent picture is glorious in the fulness of its dark rich tints of gold, azure, black, bronze, crimson, olive, brown, and grey, each colour of which comprises a thousand tints and tones exquisitely fused and subtly graded. Technically speaking, this picture is far more complete, better



Edward Burne-Jones,
*King Cophetua and the
Beggar Maid*, ca. 1883.
Watercolor,
28½ x 14½ in.
(72.4 x 36.8 cm).
Private collection



drawn, more solidly painted, more searchingly finished, and more impressively designed than any we have had from the painter before."¹¹ The *Times* declared that it was "not only the finest work that Mr Burne-Jones has ever painted, but one of the finest ever painted by an Englishman."¹²

This view would be shared by a European audience five years later, when the painting was sent to the Exposition Universelle in Paris. Whereas *The Beguiling of Merlin* (cat. no. 64) had appealed in 1878 largely to a group of informed critics, *King Cophetua* proved so universally popular in France that Burne-Jones was awarded the cross of the Légion d'honneur, and a vogue for his painting began that was to last well into the new century. Writing soon after the artist's death, the Anglophile critic Robert de la Sizeranne recalled visitors leaving the "machine" section of the Exposition, and how "we found ourselves in the silent and beautiful English Art section, and we felt as though everywhere else in the Exhibition we had seen nothing but matter, and here we had come on the exhibition of the soul." Discovering *King Cophetua*, "it seemed as though we had come forth from the Universal Exhibition of Wealth to see the symbolical expression of the Scorn of Wealth. All round this room were others, where emblems and signs of strength and luxury were collected from all the nations of the world—pyramids, silvered or gilt, representing the amount of precious metal dug year by year out of the earth; palaces and booths containing the most sumptuous products of the remotest isles—and here behold a king laying his crown at the feet of a beggar-maid for her beauty's sake! . . . It was a dream—but a noble dream—and every young man who passed that way, even though resolved never to sacrifice strength to right, or riches to beauty, was glad, nevertheless, that an artist should have depicted the Apotheosis of Poverty. It was the revenge of art on life."¹³ The Belgian Symbolist painter Fernand Khnopff (1858–1921) also remarked on the influence of the painting, which left its viewers "enwrapped by this living atmosphere of dream-love and of spiritualised fire."¹⁴

The painting was eventually bought for the nation in 1900, by public subscription, from the executors of the Earl of Wharncliffe. This greatly pleased Georgiana Burne-Jones, who

had “always thought this picture contained more of Edward’s own qualities than any other he did.”¹⁵ It remains in its original frame, one of the most spectacular of the Venetian Renaissance aedicular type favored by the artist.¹⁶

1. For the oil of 1861–62, see Taylor 1973, fig. 3; the compositional studies are described in Robinson 1973.
2. Taylor 1973, fig. 4, and Sotheby’s, June 19, 1990, lot 65. A simpler design in pencil, placing the attendants on either side above, is in the National Museums and Galleries of Wales, Cardiff (Harrison and Waters 1973, fig. 201). There is also a half-size version in oils of the final design (60½ x 28 in. [154 x 71 cm]); sold at Sotheby’s, June 20, 1989, lot 84).
3. Both in the Tate Gallery, London, reproduced in Taylor 1973, figs. 5, 7.
4. *Memorials*, vol. 2, pp. 134–35.
5. Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery (black chalk on brown paper, 230’04), where there are also three pencil studies for the king holding the crown (P73-75’72). A study for the head of one of the young singers, in the same medium, is also at Birmingham (221’04); a similar study of the other boy’s head (dated 1882, and modeled from Philip Comyns Carr, son of one of the directors of the Grosvenor Gallery) was sold at Christie’s, November 6, 1995, lot 69.
6. Illustrated, along with other items, in Vallance 1900, figs. 42, 52.
7. Henry James to Elizabeth Boott, June 2, 1884, in *Henry James: Letters*, edited by Leon Edel, vol. 3, 1883–1895 (Cambridge, Mass., 1980), p. 43. “Sargent enjoys and appreciates [Burne-Jones’s] things in the highest degree,” James noted, “but slightly narrow B.J. suffers from a constitutional incapacity to enjoy Sargent’s—finding in them ‘such a want of finish.’” To James’s mind, *King Cophetua* was “his finest thing, and very beautiful and interesting.”
8. *Memorials*, vol. 2, p. 139. Previously Burne-Jones had written, “I torment myself every day—I never learn a bit how to paint . . . but I will kill myself or else Cophetua shall look like a King and the beggar like a Queen, such as Kings and Queens ought to be” (quoted in Hartnoll 1988, p. 36).
9. Bell 1892 (1898), p. 57.
10. *Art Journal*, June 1884, p. 189.
11. *Athenaeum*, May 3, 1884, p. 573.
12. *Times* (London), May 1, 1884, p. 4. *Punch* magazine issued a typically deflationary cartoon, in whose caption the Mediaeval Royal Personage complains to the Pallid Maiden: “Oh I say, look here, you’ve been sitting on my crown,” with the comment “Yes; and she looks as if she had, too, poor thing!” (May 24, 1884, p. 244).
13. Robert de la Sizeranne, “In Memoriam, Sir Edward Burne-Jones: A Tribute from France,” *Magazine of Art*, 1898, p. 515; quoted in De Lisle 1904, pp. 1–2.
14. Fernand Khnopff, “In Memoriam, Sir Edward Burne-Jones: A Tribute from Belgium,” *Magazine of Art*, 1898, p. 520.
15. *Memorials*, vol. 2, p. 139. The painting hangs in the Tate Gallery, although Georgie’s hope was that “it should be hung in the National Gallery in Trafalgar Square, to which his mind and soul constantly turned as a hallowed place while he was alive”; letter of August 7, 1899, to George Howard, quoted in Lago 1981, p. 120.
16. See Paul Mitchell and Lynn Roberts, *A History of European Picture Frames* (London, 1996), p. 19, fig. 7a, for an original frame of exactly this kind, including winged cherubs’ heads (used for Girolamo da Santacroce’s *Virgin and Child with Saints Augustine and Peter*, ca. 1512, in the Philadelphia Museum of Art).



The Tree of Forgiveness

1881–82

Oil on canvas, 73¼ x 43¼ in. (186 x 111 cm)

Signed and dated: E.B.J. 1882; inscribed on label, verso: THE TREE OF FORGIVENESS / PHILLIS AMIDST HER MOURNING / BECAUSE DEMOPHOON HAD FORSAKEN / HER WAS TURNED INTO AN ALMOND TREE / AND AFTER AS HE PASSED BY / CONSUMED WITH SORROW FOR / HER SHE BECAME ONCE MORE / VISIBLE TO HIM NO LESS LOVING / THAN OF OLD TIME: AND THIS WAS / THE FIRST BLOSSOMING OF THE / ALMOND TREE
 PROVENANCE: Bought from the artist by Agnew's, 1882; William Imrie; Lord St. Davids; William Hesketh Lever, 1st Lord Leverhulme; presented by him, 1922

EXHIBITED: Grosvenor Gallery, London, 1882, no. 144; New Gallery 1898–99, no. 116

Board of Trustees of the National Museums and Galleries on Merseyside, Liverpool (Lady Lever Art Gallery, Port Sunlight; LL3635)

“A new rendering of an old subject,” as the *Times* put it, *The Tree of Forgiveness* is a relatively straightforward revision of *Phyllis and Demophoon* (cat. no. 48), which had caused so much trouble at the Old Water-Colour Society in 1870. Painted quickly in the winter of 1881, it was one of nine works exhibited at the Grosvenor Gallery the following spring, and was immediately snapped up by Agnew's, which sold it within the year to the Liverpool shipping magnate William Imrie, a partner in Ismay, Imrie and Co. (of the White Star Line).¹

No such furor developed on this occasion, although it is noticeable that Burne-Jones must have felt it prudent to avoid further controversy by adding a wisp of concealing drapery, of apparently doubtful function as an article of clothing; in fact, this was the trailing end of a scarf originally intended as part of additional drapery for the figure of Phyllis, which the artist decided to remove at a late stage.² The resemblance to the features of Maria Zambaco as the model for Phyllis is also decreased.

This time there was less general objection by the press to the idea of a “love chase” instigated by the woman, although the *Times* still found the picture “a strange one, its effect repellent in the extreme.”³ Both that newspaper and the *Art Journal* considered the pose and musculature of the bodies exaggerated, giving the composition “an air of strained and unnatural action, which greatly mars its effect.”⁴ As if in direct reply to this criticism, Henry James pointed out in the *Atlantic Monthly* that “the subject was difficult, and there could be no question of making it ‘natural’; Mr. Burne-Jones has had to content himself with making it lovely. It is a large, elaborate study of the undraped figure, the painter's treatment of which surely gives sufficient evidence of his knowing how to draw—an accomplishment that has sometimes been denied him. The drawing of the two figures in ‘The Tree of Forgiveness’ has knowledge and power, as well as refinement, and we should be at a loss to mention another English artist who would have acquitted himself so honourably of such an attempt.”⁵

Commentators were unanimous, however, in praise of the background and incidental details, especially the curtain of almond blossom and flowers beneath, all “drawn and painted with a thoroughness, with a depth of colour and a minuteness of detail, which can hardly be over-praised.”⁶ F. G. Stephens thought that “the linking of [Phyllis's] hands so as to clasp the waist of Demophoon is one of the beauties of a picture which is remarkable for its earnestness and profound pathos as well as for the wonderful loveliness of its colour.”⁷ To Henry James, its color was delightfully cool—“cool with the coolness of a gray day in summer.”⁸ Even the *Art Journal* relented in the face of “colour harmonies in which the glowing hues of a Venetian palette [are] used with a skill which could not be surpassed by any contemporary painter.”⁹

1. See Lady Lever Art Gallery Collection 1994, pp. 17–19.
2. “Her draperies are of dark sea-green, and kirtle-like, fall from her waist. Her scarf, the design of which illustrates the mode of that school to which the art of Mr. Burne-Jones frequently refers, partakes of its mistress's emotion, and, wind-driven, twines around the limbs of Demophoon” (*Athenaeum*, December 24, 1881, p. 859).
3. *Times* (London), May 8, 1882.
4. Ibid.
5. *Atlantic Monthly*, August 1882, reprinted in James 1956, p. 207.
6. *Times* (London), May 8, 1882.
7. *Athenaeum*, May 6, 1882, p. 575.
8. *Atlantic Monthly*, August 1882, reprinted in James 1956, p. 207.
9. *Art Journal*, June 1882, p. 189.

Cupid's Hunting Fields

1885

Watercolor and gold, 39 x 30 in. (99 x 76 cm)

Signed: EBJ

PROVENANCE: Purchased from D. Croal Thomson, 1924

EXHIBITED: Herron Museum of Art 1964, no. 27

The Art Institute of Chicago. Robert Alexander Waller Memorial Collection (1924.576)

NEW YORK ONLY

This composition is one that Burne-Jones toyed with over a long period. It is an integral part of *The Passing of Venus* (see cat. nos. 99–101), but does not appear in the version of that subject which forms part of the background to *Laus Veneris* (cat. no. 63), where the figure of Cupid is a winged putto. A kneeling young male nude Cupid, bending his bow downward, appears in the central panel of the *Pyramus and Thisbe* triptych of 1872–76 (Williamson Art Gallery and Museum, Birkenhead). A first nude study of the central figures of the new composition is to be found in the Perseus sketchbook (cat. no. 98), dating from 1875, but it was not until 1880 that a monochrome painting in oil was begun, to be exhibited at the Grosvenor Gallery two years later. This was bought by Constantine Alexander Ionides, and is now in the Victoria and Albert Museum.¹ Malcolm Bell, in his 1892 monograph on Burne-Jones, described this as a “charming fancy . . . in low





tones of grey and green [in which] the God of Love, blind-folded and fitting an arrow to his bow, steps down among a bevy of damsels, nude and draped, by a riverside, one of whom lies crouched upon the ground beneath his very feet, while the others turn to escape."²

Burne-Jones must have been aware that such a static and formalized image would benefit from three-dimensional treatment, and at the same time he had it executed, probably by his junior studio assistant Matthew Webb (ca. 1851–1924), as a low-relief panel in gesso; his record of work for 1880 lists "Cupid's hunting ground, in raised work, gilded and stained. Same subject in Terra Verde." This was apparently a commission from Sir Hugh Lupus Grosvenor, later Duke of Westminster, who had originally requested a similar treatment of *The Triumph of Love* (*The Passing of Venus*) in 1878. On the Grosvenor panel (now in the Delaware Art Museum, Wilmington) the faces are left flat and painted in detail, the oil coloring extending also to the gesso itself, heightened with gold.³ The Chicago watercolor, which has been dated to 1885, shows some variations of detail, notably in reverting to a nude Cupid; the Cupid in the Grosvenor panel wears gilded armor.

1. Victoria and Albert Museum, London (Ionides 9; 39 x 30 in.); see Basil S. Long, *Victoria and Albert Museum: Catalogue of the Constantine Alexander Ionides Collection* (London, 1925), p. 9. A more finished male nude study for Cupid, holding a bow, was sold at Christie's, New York, January 7, 1981, lot 241.

2. Bell 1892 (1898), p. 55.

3. See Delaware Art Museum collection (1978), pp. 42–43.

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Georgiana Burne-Jones

Begun 1883

Oil on canvas, 29 x 21 in. (73.7 x 53.3 cm)

PROVENANCE: By descent in the family of the artist and sitter

EXHIBITED: Arts Council 1975–76, no. 236

Private collection

This haunting portrait was not exhibited during Burne-Jones's lifetime. It was started, according to his work record, in 1883, and Georgie wrote in the *Memorials* that "he worked at [it] for years at intervals, but never finished [it] to satisfy himself."¹

When the picture was begun, the sitter was forty-three and had been married for twenty-three years. The third surviving daughter of a Methodist minister, George Browne Macdonald, she was one of a group of sisters who were to unite the families of two eminent Victorian artists, Burne-Jones and Edward Poynter, and of two distinguished men of the next generation, the writer Rudyard Kipling and the Conservative



Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin. Small in stature, with a demure elegance that reminded Charles Eliot Norton of the trim little female figures in the work of Thomas Stothard (1755–1834), she nonetheless possessed great strength of character. Some indeed found her formidable, and her high-mindedness could sometimes lead her astray. Totally lacking in self-consciousness, she had no hesitation in ramming the ideas of Ruskin and Morris down the throats of servants or the Rottingdean peasantry. Nor was she above editing the record of events in her *Memorials*, or badgering his assistant T. M. Rooke to destroy many of the notes he kept of conversations in the studio because they did not conform to the picture of her husband that she wished to perpetuate. But these were period failings. The *Memorials* remains a masterpiece, a monument to its author no less than to its subject, and Burne-Jones would have been totally lost without Georgie like a rock behind him, taking care of business matters, shielding him from time-wasting intruders, and humoring his whims and foibles—not to mention, by her skill as a singer and pianist, providing so much of the music that he found inspiring. Her finest hour was in 1869 when, still aged only twenty-nine, she held their lives together in the storm of emotion resulting from his affair with Maria Zambaco (cat. no. 49). In answer to a letter from her close friend Rosalind Howard, later Countess of Carlisle, she wrote:

Indeed, my dear, I am no heroine at all, and I know where I come short as well as anyone else does—I have simply acted all along from very simple little reasons, which God and my husband know better than anyone. . . . Dearest Rosalind, be hard on no one in this matter, and exalt no one, and may we all come through it at last. I know one thing, and that is that there is love enough between Edward and me to last out a long life if it is given us.

As Penelope Fitzgerald observes, “Of this letter one can only say that not many painters, and not many men, deserve such a wife.”²

Burne-Jones may have been dissatisfied with the portrait, but it brilliantly captures Georgie’s personality, her serenity, self-possession, and moral courage. Above all, it bears out Graham Robertson’s description of her “wonderful eyes of clearest grey,” which always cost him “little subconscious heart-searchings, . . . lest . . . in their grave wisdom, their crystal purity, [they] should rest on anything unworthy.”³ In her hands she holds an herbal, open at an illustration of a pansy or heartsease, an actual specimen of which rests on the page. The flower symbolizes undying love, and Georgie was to invoke this meaning again when she placed a small bunch of it in Burne-Jones’s grave when his ashes were interred at Rottingdean in 1898. In the background we see their two children, Philip and Margaret, who would have been twenty-two and seventeen respectively in 1883. Philip is seated at his easel, an indication that he too is an artist, albeit one who was too overshadowed by his father and lacking in self-confidence ever to

really make his mark. The composition is one that Burne-Jones often used, and is characteristic of sixteenth-century Mannerist painting. There seems, in fact, to be a link in the dependence of his early watercolor *Sidonia von Bork* (cat. no. 12) on Giulio Romano’s portrait of Isabella d’Este at Hampton Court.

[JC]

1. *Memorials*, vol. 2, p. 134.

2. Quoted in Fitzgerald 1975, p. 121. The letter, dated February 18, 1869, is at Castle Howard, Yorkshire.

3. Robertson 1931, p. 75.

II7.

Margaret Burne-Jones

1885–86

Oil on canvas, 38 x 28 in. (96.5 x 71.1 cm)

Signed and dated lower left: EBJ 1886

PROVENANCE: By descent in the family of the artist and sitter

EXHIBITED: Grosvenor Gallery, London, 1887, no. 98; New Gallery 1892–93, no. 24; New Gallery 1898–99, no. 87; Tate Gallery 1933, no. 6; Arts Council 1975–76, no. 237

Private collection

The portrait was begun in the autumn of 1885, completed the following year, and exhibited at the Grosvenor Gallery in 1887. The identity of the sitter was not revealed in the catalogue, the picture merely being entitled *A Portrait*, but it must have been an open secret in the small and somewhat incestuous world of the Grosvenor’s habitués. Four other works were also shown, including *The Garden of Pan* (cat. no. 120) and the portrait of Katie Lewis (cat. no. 118). This was the artist’s last appearance at the gallery that had made his name and of which from the outset he had been the star attraction.

In its day the portrait was regarded as Burne-Jones’s greatest achievement in this field. Widely exhibited and reproduced, it enjoyed a much higher profile than it has had in recent years. Even before the Grosvenor exhibition opened, F. G. Stephens, the veteran art critic of the *Athenaeum*, was whetting his readers’ appetite, writing in one of his “Fine Art Gossip” columns that the sitter’s “lovely face wears a most sweet smile and gentle expression, as if a secret joy possessed her mind.”¹ When the exhibition opened he hailed the portrait as “certainly the finest” on show, although “a number of excellent portraits” by other artists were present.² The *Times*’s critic felt that “Mr Burne-Jones has never surpassed this admirable piece of work, so far at least as sheer painter’s ability is concerned. There is a refinement, a spirituality in the face which it would be vain to look for in the work of any other living painter.”³

Burne-Jones was a reluctant portraitist, well aware that his concern to find his own ideal in a face severely limited his range. Though a keen student of human nature and an acute observer, as his caricatures show, of physiognomy, he could not

bring himself, even in portraiture, to break a strict aesthetic code. To have attempted to portray character in the conventional sense would have struck at the very roots of his art and led him into areas so remote from his chosen territory that the result would have been an embarrassing anomaly, if not an ignominious failure.

Not surprisingly, he is often at his best as a portraitist when painting family or friends, and his success on the present occasion was clearly the result of complete sympathy with his sitter. Born in 1866, and therefore twenty when the portrait was painted, Margaret was the apple of her father's eye and a beauty who bore an almost uncanny resemblance to his preferred female type. From early years she was his "dear companion," reading his favorite books to him as he worked in the studio

and sharing with him "their own world of fun."⁴ "I remember," her mother recalled, "hearing him and Millais once talk to each other about their daughters, each boasting that he was the most devoted father. 'Ah, but *you* don't take your daughter's breakfast up to her in bed,' said Edward, certain that the prize belonged to him. Millais's triumphant 'Yes, I do!' left them only equal."⁵

In September 1888, two years after the portrait was painted, Margaret married J. W. Mackail (1859–1945), one of the most eminent classical scholars of the day and the future biographer of William Morris. Dismayed at the thought of losing someone "on whom I depend for everything and without whom I should crumble into senility," her father suffered "a short torment of jealousy,"⁶ although he was to become an

equally devoted grandparent when Margaret herself had children. Angela, a winsome and headstrong child who later achieved fame as the novelist Angela Thirkell, was born in 1890, followed by Denis, the biographer of J. M. Barrie, in 1892. Margaret herself never aspired to artistic expression, devoting herself to her family and friends, many of whom, such as the actress Mrs. Patrick Campbell and Lady Elcho, one of the Souls, she had met through her father. Geographically, too, she remained close to her roots, living all her adult life in Kensington, after her marriage at 27 Young Street and later for many years at 6 Pembroke Gardens. Her personality was something of an enigma, as the portrait perhaps suggests. "Margaret is *very* difficult to know," Graham Robertson wrote in 1936. "She is still almost as shy as when she was a child [they had known each other since the age of twelve], and has the Macdonald reticence and reserve [a reference to her maternal ancestry] developed to an abnormal degree." But, he added to his correspondent, who had recently met her for the first time, "I hope you could see her beauty through the veil of the years. The wonderful



eyes are almost unchanged.”⁷ Having lived stoically through the long period of her father’s eclipse, Margaret died in 1953, about a decade before the tide of fashion turned.

The portrait shows her dressed in blue, her father’s favorite color and the one with which she was associated in his mind. Her mother wrote that “the room reflected in the mirror—recognisable in minute detail to those who knew it—was her own.”⁸ The circular convex mirror itself is a motif that often occurs in the work of the Pre-Raphaelites and their followers. Ultimately, it stems from the one in Jan van Eyck’s Arnolfini marriage portrait (1434) in the National Gallery, London, a picture all the artists knew well.

Burne-Jones painted two other portraits of his daughter, one, earlier, seated in profile to left, the other, a few years later, full face and standing (both private collection). She also sat to G. F. Watts, Sir William Blake Richmond, and her uncle Edward Poynter. In her father’s imaginative work she appears in *The Golden Stairs* (cat. no. 109) and as the sleeping princess in the Briar Rose paintings at Buscot Park (see illus. on p. 158), a role it is not hard to equate with her place in the artist’s life before her marriage.

[JC]

1. *Athenaeum*, April 30, 1887, p. 584.
2. *Ibid.*, May 7, 1887, p. 613.
3. *Times* (London), May 2, 1887, p. 12.
4. *Memorials*, vol. 2, pp. 82, 160.
5. *Ibid.*, pp. 160–61.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 182.
7. Robertson, *Letters*, p. 346.
8. *Memorials*, vol. 2, p. 160.

II.8.

Katie Lewis

1886

Oil on canvas, 24 x 50 in. (61 x 127 cm)

Inscribed: EBJ to GBL lower left and dated 1886 on the pages of the book
PROVENANCE: Given by the artist to the sitter’s father, Sir George Lewis, in 1897; Lady Lewis; Katherine Lewis, the sitter; by descent to her niece Elizabeth Wansbrough; Sotheby’s, June 7, 1995, lot 149

EXHIBITED: Grosvenor Gallery, London, 1887, no. 235; New Gallery 1898–99, no. 77; Tate Gallery 1933, no. 32; Arts Council 1975–76, no. 240

Mallett Gallery, London

This informal and slightly eccentric portrait, one, perhaps, that only an artist who was not a professional portrait painter could have produced, was exhibited at the Grosvenor Gallery in 1887. With it appeared the more conventional portrait of Margaret Burne-Jones (cat. no. 117), *The Garden of Pan* (cat. no. 120), *The Baleful Head* (1886–87; Staatsgalerie Stuttgart), the first of Arthur Balfour’s Perseus paintings to reach completion, and the monument to Laura Lyttelton (fig. 100). Just as the convex mirror in the portrait of Margaret seems to be a distant echo of this motif in Van Eyck’s Arnolfini marriage portrait (1434) in the National Gallery, London, so the little long-haired dog and

the orange in the portrait of Katie Lewis appear to be inspired by the presence of these details in that celebrated painting. Purchased in 1842, the picture had fascinated the Pre-Raphaelites ever since Holman Hunt, in the earliest days of the movement, had found sanction for his principles in “the newly acquired Van Eyck.” Burne-Jones went back to it time and again. “As a young man,” he told his assistant T. M. Rooke in 1897, “I’ve stood before that picture of the man and his wife, and made up my mind to try and do something as deep and rich in colour and as beautifully finished in painting, and I’ve gone away and never done it, and now the time’s gone by.”²

Even so, it is not entirely clear why Burne-Jones chose to refer to the picture in his portrait of Katie Lewis. Possibly the mirror in the portrait of Margaret had turned his thoughts in this direction, or perhaps Katie’s dog (for it is presumably one she owned and not some figment of the artist’s imagination) reminded him of the picture, and he went on to add the orange as the focal point of the rich coral-and-gold background, which sets off the dark tones of Katie’s hair and dress. Certainly tone was the value he particularly associated with the Van Eyck. “The tone of it is simply marvellous,” he said on another occasion to Rooke, “and the beautiful colour each little object has. . . . He permits himself extreme darkness though. It’s all very well to say it’s a purple dress—very dark brown is more the colour of it. And the black, no words can describe the blackness of it.”³ Perhaps the real debt to Van Eyck in *Katie Lewis* lies not in two specific details but in the general tone and the mysterious color of the girl’s costume, which hovers between dark green and black just as that of Giovanni Arnolfini hovers between “very dark brown” and “purple.”

Katie Lewis was the youngest child of Sir George Lewis, the most famous solicitor of the day, and his wife, Elizabeth. Born in 1833, the same year as Burne-Jones, Lewis came from a family of Sephardic Jews that had probably immigrated to England from the Netherlands in the eighteenth century. Excluded from Oxford and Cambridge because of his religion, he entered University College, London, in 1847, joining his father’s firm of Lewis and Lewis three years later. He soon gained a reputation for exceptional shrewdness and ability, and from 1876, when he made his name by representing the relatives of the poisoned Charles Bravo in the so-called Balham Mystery, he was involved in nearly every cause célèbre that came to court in London. His services were particularly sought in connection with society scandals, including several involving the Prince of Wales. At the Prince’s Coronation in 1902 he was created a baronet.

Lewis married twice. His first wife died in 1865 and two years later he married Elizabeth Eberstadt, the third of five daughters of Ferdinand Eberstadt of Mannheim. Eleven years younger than her husband, she was blessed with good looks, great strength of character, boundless energy, and a genius for friendship. She was also passionately devoted to the arts. George, whose work brought him into close contact with the stage, shared her aesthetic interests, while his growing success and rapidly expanding income gave her the scope to indulge them.



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The Lewises were already entertaining artists during the early years of their marriage, but it was when they moved to 88 Portland Place in 1876 that Elizabeth's career as a hostess took wing, and she was able to launch a salon on the grand scale. A glance at the books in which she kept a record of her dinner guests reveals an astonishing galaxy of talent: Burne-Jones, Whistler, du Maurier, Alma-Tadema, Sargent, Sullivan, Paderewski, Rubinstein, Sarasate, Joachim, George Henschel, Browning, Henry James, Oscar Wilde, J. M. Barrie, Ellen Terry, Henry Irving, and Lillie Langtry—these are only some of the more famous names. Nor were they by any means mere social trophies. Wilde's letters to Elizabeth during his tour of America in 1882 show with what affection and gratitude he regarded the Lewises, and Whistler, who was among the most prickly of men, remained a close friend for many years. George represented him when he was declared bankrupt after his libel action against Ruskin in 1878 (see p. 195).

But by far the closest of these artistic friendships was with Burne-Jones and his wife and children. How and when the two families met is unclear, but they were on intimate terms by the late 1870s, and from then on the artist was a frequent visitor to Portland Place and Ashley Cottage, the Lewises' country house at Walton-on-Thames. He sought George's help over legal matters and wrote constantly to Elizabeth, relying on her for sympathy and practical advice. Perhaps he was a little in love with her, as he was with so many of his women friends. Certainly after his death she destroyed many of his letters, considering them too intimate to survive.

George Lewis's eldest child, Alice, was the daughter of his first wife. With Elizabeth he had three children: George, born in 1868, who was to take over the firm and inherit the baronet-

cy; Gertrude (or Gertie), born in 1871; and Katherine (Katie), born in 1878. The two girls made a striking contrast. Gertie was quiet, gentle, and sympathetic, while Katie was alarmingly strong-willed and high-spirited. Oscar Wilde, writing to Elizabeth from Boston in June 1882, called Katie "that trenchant critic of life."⁴ In another letter from Chicago he wrote that he had heard "that she has ceased to be the modern Nero and is now angelic, and gives up to Gertie. If she does I no longer adore her: her fascinating villainy touched my artistic soul."⁵

Burne-Jones would have agreed with these sentiments. He had recently started sending Katie a series of illustrated letters (British Museum, London) which are among the most charming and characteristic of their kind and have twice been published under the title *Letters to Katie* (fig. 103).⁶ She had entered his life at an opportune moment, filling what Graham Robertson called the "babyleless void" between the infancy of his own children and the arrival of his grandchildren, Angela and Denis Mackail, in the 1890s. As his relations with Angela were to prove, he was a man who responded to precocious little girls, and Katie for her part no doubt played up to him, being quite shrewd enough to appreciate what it meant to have someone so famous for an admirer. Among the letters is a revealing note that Burne-Jones wrote to his son, Philip, when he was staying at Ashley Cottage in May 1882: "Katie has turned wonderfully affectionate to me and embarrasses me with gifts, and this morning appeared before I got up in my bedroom and insisted with screams on stopping while I got into my tub—and I never had such trouble to get free in all my life. . . . She says tomorrow she will see me in my tub, which fills me with terror." It was Katie who coined the name "Mr. Beak,"

with which he signed all his letters to her, sometimes in pictorial form.

Burne-Jones made a pencil drawing of Elizabeth Lewis and painted both Katie and Gertie,⁷ but (letters apart) the portrait of Katie was the chief monument to the friendship. At the Grosvenor it attracted little attention, perhaps because it was not hung, like the artist's other paintings, in the prestigious West Gallery. Nor, surprisingly, did Burne-Jones give it to the Lewises for another decade, as we know from Rooke's record of studio conversations in November 1897. Sir George, Burne-Jones told him, "was very pleased with his daughter's portrait that I sent him the other day. Vowed it was exactly like her now, though it isn't. For she is a young lady of twenty-two [in fact, nineteen], and when it was done she was only a child of eight. He didn't know what to do to thank me. His wife did it quite successfully, but he couldn't. All he could do was to make me take away as many boxes of cigars as he could lay hands on. He fidgeted about the room to try and find something to give me that I would like, and couldn't satisfy himself at all. Rather pathetic, wasn't it, to see a man in that state who is the terror of the aristocracy of England and knows enough to hang half the Dukes and Duchesses in the kingdom."⁸ Presumably the painting had already been dated on the pages of the book that Katie is so intently reading, open at an illustration of Saint George and the dragon, while the inscription recording the gift in the lower left corner was added at this time.

It is perhaps not surprising that Katie never married. As a child, the baby of her family with men like Burne-Jones and Wilde eager to pay her court, she seems to have been more than a little spoiled, and in later life, rich, witty, and self-centered, she could well have deterred suitors. After her father's death in 1911 she continued to live in Portland Place with her mother, to whom she was devoted. When Elizabeth died in 1931 she moved to Evelyn Gardens, South Kensington, before settling in the Cotswold village of Broadway during the Second World War. She never lost her vitality and personal magnetism, and continued to attract the talented and famous until the end of her life. Max Beerbohm, Osbert Sitwell, Margot Asquith, Sybil Colefax (who decorated her house in Evelyn Gardens), Rex Whistler, Desmond MacCarthy, and Rupert Hart-Davis were among her devoted friends, and she appears in many memoirs of the time. Her greatest love, however, was Bernard Berenson, with whom she conducted a lively and flirtatious correspondence from 1914 until his death in 1959. She died in 1961, leaving her treasured Burne-Jones letters to the British Museum. [JC]

1. W. Holman Hunt, *Pre-Raphaelitism and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood* (London, 1905), vol. 1, p. 54.

2. Lago 1981, p. 132; also quoted in *Memorials*, vol. 2, p. 306.

3. Lago 1981, p. 136; also quoted in *Memorials*, vol. 2, p. 189.

4. Rupert Hart-Davis, ed., *The Letters of Oscar Wilde* (London, 1962), p. 120.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 95.

6. The letters were first published in 1925, edited by W. Graham Robertson; and again in 1988, with an introduction by John Christian.

7. The drawing of Elizabeth and portrait of Gertie were included in the Arts Council exhibition (1975–76, nos. 238, 239).

8. Lago 1981, p. 164.

II9.

The Depths of the Sea

1886

Oil on canvas, 77½ x 29½ in. (197 x 75 cm)

Signed and dated lower left: EBJ 1886

PROVENANCE: Robert Henry Benson by 1892, and still in the possession of his descendants in 1975

EXHIBITED: Royal Academy, London, 1886, no. 314; New Gallery 1892–93, no. 34; New Gallery 1898–99, no. 101; Arts Council 1975–76, no. 155

Private collection, by courtesy of Julian Hartnoll

A mermaid, having seized the body of a drowning sailor, drags him down to the depths of the sea; her smile expresses her sense of triumph, and she is unaware that he is already dead.

This rather macabre picture was painted early in 1886 and exhibited at the Royal Academy that summer, the only time Burne-Jones showed at Burlington House. He had been elected an associate of the Academy the previous year. This took him completely by surprise, as he had never sought election and was well known to be the mainstay of the rival Grosvenor Gallery. He was also wary of entering what his patron William Graham called the "gilded cage in Piccadilly." Nonetheless, touched by the spontaneous gesture and encouraged by Sir Frederic Leighton, the President, who was eager to recruit new talent, he accepted. The decision soon proved a disaster. The Academy was not his spiritual home, he chafed at the loss of independence, and the academicians, sensing his halfhearted involvement, did not make him a full member. He exhibited nothing after 1886, and in 1893, to Leighton's intense dismay, he resigned.

Mermaids and sirens are common enough in Victorian art. Leighton, Poynter, J. W. Waterhouse, H. J. Draper, and many others made notable contributions to the genre. Burne-Jones's interest seems to be linked to his purchase of a house at Rottingdean (fig. 93), a village on the Sussex coast a mile or two east of Brighton, in 1880. He spent most of his holidays there from then on, and the proximity of the sea inspired a number of paintings on the theme of mermaid life. It was typical that he should give literary expression to a natural phenomenon, although his treatment of the seabed in *The Depths of the Sea*, the most important example, bears out Henry James's perceptive comment that, for all their cerebral character, his pictures "could not have been produced without a vast deal of 'looking' on the painter's part."¹

To achieve the desired submarine effect, Burne-Jones borrowed a studio property that the artist Henry Holiday had devised when painting a picture of the Rhine Maidens in Wagner's opera *Das Rheingold*. "For this purpose," Holiday wrote, "I modelled the three nymphs, tinted them, and placed them in a large tank with a plate-glass front, filled with water coloured transparent blue-green. I also modelled rocks, and the effect was curiously natural. Burne-Jones borrowed my

tank later when he painted his 'Mermaid.'² Fearful, perhaps, that he was making the picture almost too naturalistic, Burne-Jones refrained from adding a shoal of fishes at the top. Leighton, however, having been to see what he intended to exhibit, persuaded him to put them in. "I like the idea of the fish up there *bugely*," he wrote, "they would emphasise the fanciful character which is the charm of the picture, and would bring home to the vulgar eye . . . the *underwateriness* which you have indicated by those delightful green swirls in the background."³ Burne-Jones duly complied with this tactfully put suggestion. Leighton was not President of the Royal Academy for nothing.

Perhaps inevitably the enigmatic, almost provocative smile on the mermaid's face has led to speculation about the model. Georgie Burne-Jones herself encouraged this by stating that she and the artist "always associated" the picture with Laura Lyttelton, since "the face of the mermaid had some likeness to her strange charm of expression."⁴ Born in 1862, the daughter of Sir Charles Tennant and the elder sister of the formidable Margot Asquith, Laura had been one of the brightest and most beloved of the Souls; but a year after marrying Alfred Lyttelton in 1885, she died giving birth to a son. Burne-Jones was deeply moved at the sudden extinction of a life so full of promise, and set about designing a memorial, which he exhibited at the Grosvenor in 1887. Meanwhile another friend, Lady Lewis, was forming her own romantic theory about the mermaid, claiming that it represented a young girl whom the artist had seen in the woods when he was staying with her in the country. "He was as under a spell," she wrote, "and when we came home at once made a drawing of her from memory . . . ; he never altered it, but used it for the head of the mermaid. Often he spoke of her—said he was sure she was a nixie and had come up from the well."⁵ Whatever the truth of this, a fine study for the mermaid's head (Lady Lever Art Gallery, Port Sunlight) has all the appearance of having been made from a professional model.

There was intense interest to see what Burne-Jones would send to the Academy, and he was clearly taking a risk in submitting such a novel and disturbing work. F. G. Stephens, writing in the *Athenaeum*, thought it "a picture of importance, representing a new and difficult subject. It possesses noble and subtle charms of colour, it is finished with extraordinary care, and in some respects marks a new departure." For him the male nude was "the weak portion of the work," and, inexplicably, he felt that the mermaid's body should have been larger; but her face, he wrote, was "a marvel of wicked witchery."⁶ The *Times* described it as a "strange picture," and made the valid point that the viewer might well ask whether there was really any water between him and the figures. But again it praised the mermaid's expression—"a look of triumph that is neither human nor diabolic . . . almost worthy of Leonardo da Vinci" himself.⁷

Before he dispatched the picture Burne-Jones told Frances Horner that it would be "lost entirely in the



Academy,”⁸ and this proved to be the case. “Naturally enough,” the *Times* review concludes, “the hanging committee have found a good deal of difficulty in providing Mr Burne-Jones’s mermaid with proper neighbours. They have finally decided on flanking her with two portraits of modern ladies in red, with small landscapes below them, and above a rather ghastly picture of the end of a stag hunt.” The remark goes far to explain why he had not exhibited at the Academy before, and never showed there again.

A watercolor version of the picture, painted in 1887, is in the Fogg Art Museum, Cambridge, Mass.

[JC]

1. James 1956, p. 145.
2. Henry Holiday, *Reminiscences of My Life* (London, 1914), p. 267.
3. *Memorials*, vol. 2, p. 165.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 166.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 307.
6. *Athenaeum*, April 24, 1886, p. 561, May 1, 1886, p. 590.
7. *Times* (London), May 1, 1886, p. 10, May 8, 1886, p. 8.
8. *Memorials*, vol. 2, p. 165.

120.

The Garden of Pan

1876–87

Oil on canvas, 60 x 73½ in. (152.5 x 186.7 cm)

Signed and dated lower right: EB-J 1886–7

PROVENANCE: Lily, Duchess of Marlborough, by 1892; her sale, Christie’s, May 10, 1918, lot 95; bought by Robert Ross for the National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, for 1,150 gns. (Felton Bequest)

EXHIBITED: Grosvenor Gallery, London, 1887, no. 66; New Gallery 1892–93, no. 41; New Gallery 1898–99, no. 127; Arts Council 1975–76, no. 156

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne. Felton Bequest 1919 (961–3)

In 1872, on a wave of creative euphoria resulting from his visit to Italy the previous year, Burne-Jones wrote in his work record that there were “4 subjects which above all others I desire to paint, and count by chief designs for some years to come.” In the event, none of these was to be fully realized. *The Car of Love* (begun 1870; Victoria and Albert Museum, London) and *The Sirens* (cat. no. 157) exist as large unfinished canvases. *The Vision of Britomart*, later retitled *The Masque of Cupid*, survives only in the form of drawings (cat. nos. 60–62), while the fourth subject was reduced in scope to become the present picture.

The composition was originally to show “the beginning of the world—with Pan and Echo and sylvan gods, and a forest full of centaurs, and a wild background of woods, mountains and rivers.” Burne-Jones soon realized that this was too ambitious, and during the next few years he evolved the simpler design which we see today. Sketches appear in a sketchbook of the period,¹ and an entry in the work record for 1876—“began

the large picture of Pan in the woods”—shows that the canvas itself was started that year. It is interesting that sketches for *The Annunciation* (cat. no. 104) appear on the same page of the same sketchbook as those for *The Garden of Pan*, and that the commencement of the two pictures is recorded almost consecutively in the work list.

Unlike *The Annunciation*, which was completed three years later, *The Garden of Pan* hung fire for another decade, although if the date 1880 on a careful study for the head of Pan is correct² (and Burne-Jones often misdated his drawings when he exhibited them long after they were executed), then preparation was not entirely in abeyance. Whatever the case, in 1886 we read that the picture had been “begun,” that is to say, taken up again with a view to completion and exhibition; and the following year “the pastoral of the youth of Pan” was finally “finished.” The picture was exhibited at the Grosvenor Gallery that summer, together with *The Baleful Head* (1886–87; Staatsgalerie Stuttgart), the first of Arthur Balfour’s Perseus subjects to reach completion, and the portraits of Margaret Burne-Jones and Katie Lewis (cat. nos. 117, 118).

Burne-Jones’s reference to the picture as “the youth of Pan” is not accidental. According to his widow, this was the original title and the artist adopted the present one at the suggestion of J. W. Mackail, the distinguished classical scholar who became his son-in-law in 1888.³ The composition clearly echoes certain Italian Renaissance painters, the names of Piero di Cosimo and Dosso Dossi both coming to mind. It is probably significant that Burne-Jones’s patron William Graham had fine examples of both masters in his collection.⁴ Certainly Graham’s fondness for the more romantic and idyllic type of Italian painting had a profound influence on Burne-Jones, and it is perhaps surprising that, so far as we know, he never attempted to commission *The Garden of Pan*.

The picture is one of the very few in which Burne-Jones reveals a trace of his abundant sense of humor. Compared with the solemn *Annunciation* of 1879, at one point its exact contemporary, or the reverential *King Cophetua* of 1884 (cat. no. 112), which is also of the same period, it is positively skittish. Burne-Jones himself acknowledged this, observing that the picture was “meant to be a little foolish and to delight in foolishness—and is a reaction from the dazzle of London wit and wisdom.”⁵

Perhaps it was this accessible, undemanding quality that made the picture popular when it appeared at the Grosvenor. “In poetic suggestiveness,” wrote F. G. Stephens, “‘The Garden of Pan’ is second to none of [the artist’s] works.”⁶ Another critic thought it “a most interesting experiment.” He liked the “charming” figure of the girl and the “great landscape that recalls Bellini and the other early Venetians,” but “the really delightful part of the picture” for him was Pan. This “strange young creature . . . with a face that is a compound of naiveté, curiosity, and independence . . . [is] a real imaginative triumph on which the painter may be congratulated; the foreground, too, and the water flowing by the little rocks, on one of which sits a kingfisher listening unalarmed and undisturbed, are

exquisite in conception and painting.”⁷

The picture was bought for the National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, by Oscar Wilde’s friend and literary executor Robert Ross (1869–1918) during the short period when he acted as the gallery’s adviser for the purchases of works of art under the terms of the Felton Bequest. Ross accepted the post early in 1917, and was planning to visit Australia in connection with the work when he died in October the following year. [JC]



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1. Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, no. 1085ff., 16 verso–17 recto.
2. Private collection; Arts Council 1975–76, no. 157; M. T. Ritchie, *English Drawings* (London, 1935), pl. 86.
3. *Memorials*, vol. 2, p. 174.
4. As noted above, Graham owned Piero di Cosimo’s *Hylas and the Nymphs* (ca. 1485–90; Wadsworth Atheneum, Hartford) and Dosso Dossi’s *Circe* (ca. 1528; National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.). He also had another important Dosso Dossi, *The Fight of Orlando and Rodomonte* (ca. 1523; Wadsworth Atheneum).
5. *Memorials*, vol. 2, p. 175.
6. *Athenaeum*, May 7, 1887, p. 613.
7. *Times* (London), May 2, 1887, p. 12.

121.

The Tower of Brass

1888

Oil on canvas, 91 x 44½ in. (231 x 113 cm)

Signed and dated on steps at left: EBJ 1888

PROVENANCE: Bought from the artist by William Connal for £1,000

EXHIBITED: New Gallery, London, 1888, no. 54; New Gallery 1892–93, no. 59; Arts Council 1975–76, no. 177

Glasgow Museums: Art Gallery and Museum, Kelvingrove. Gift of William Connal, 1901 (936)

Acrisius, King of Argos, was warned by an oracle that the son of his daughter, Danaë, would slay him. He therefore shut her up in a brazen tower, where she was seduced by

Jove in the form of a shower of gold. When she bore a child, Perseus, Acrisius had them cast adrift in a small boat on the sea; but by divine intervention they survived, and in due course Perseus grew up and accidentally killed his grandfather, thus fulfilling the prophecy. The picture shows Danaë watching apprehensively as the brazen tower is built.

Burne-Jones was considering the pictorial treatment of the story from the late 1860s, when Morris recast it in “The Doom of King Acrisius,” one of the narrative poems in *The Earthly Paradise* (1868–70). He drew up a list of proposed designs, and even embodied one or two in sketches; many years later Morris’s daughter May recalled “a touching little drawing of Danaë with her babe Perseus in her arms, in a boat on the open sea.”¹ When the plan to publish a fully illustrated edition of the book collapsed, the designs were taken no further, but in 1875 Burne-Jones returned to the theme when Arthur Balfour commissioned him to illustrate the story of Perseus in a series of decorative paintings for the music room of his London house, 4 Carlton Gardens. The subject of Danaë watching her prison being built was not included, all the scenes being taken from the hero’s manhood, but in 1872 and 1876 Burne-Jones painted two small pictures of this incident, both on panel and both for William Graham, who had a tendency to commission more than one version of a composition he particularly liked. The present painting was the third, final, and by far the largest version. Burne-Jones’s work record does not say when it was started, but we know that it was completed in 1888, in time for the opening of the New Gallery that summer.

Situated on the site of an old fruit market in Regent Street, the New Gallery was the successor to the Grosvenor Gallery and was intended to carry on its ideals. Because of the financial embarrassment of Sir Coutts Lindsay, the proprietor, the Grosvenor had let its standards drop, and in 1887 his two fellow directors, Charles Hallé and Joseph Comyns Carr, resigned to found their own establishment. Burne-Jones, G. F. Watts, and other luminaries of the Grosvenor lent their moral support, and many of Burne-Jones's wealthy patrons and admirers provided the necessary funds. Burne-Jones was on the Consulting Committee, together with the painters William Holman Hunt, Lawrence Alma-Tadema, W. B. Richmond, and Hubert von Herkomer, and the sculptors Alfred Gilbert and Edward Onslow Ford. Anxious to redeem his promise of support, he sent three large recent oils—two of Balfour's Perseus paintings, *The Rock of Doom* and *The Doom Fulfilled* (both Staatsgalerie Stuttgart), and the present picture—as well as a number of drawings. The paintings hung in a place of honor in the West Gallery, the upright and brightly colored *Tower of Brass* in the center with the squarer and more somber Perseus subjects to left and right—a temporary triptych linked by a common theme and contrasting interpretation.

The private view on May 8 was as great a social success as that at the opening of the Grosvenor eleven years earlier. Among the first to arrive was W. E. Gladstone, taking time off from studying the question of Irish home rule, which had brought down his government in 1886. "My husband," Mrs. Comyns Carr wrote, "escorted him round, and Mr. Gladstone was particularly interested in two Burne-Jones canvases, one of Perseus and Andromeda, and the other the tragic figure of Danaë, in a crimson robe, watching the building of her prison."² Gladstone had known Burne-Jones for many years, and was to offer him a baronetcy in 1894.

Press comment was enthusiastic; the critics had long since accepted the artist as an institution and a fixture on the London cultural scene. The ever-faithful (but not uncritical) F. G. Stephens discussed the pictures at length in the *Athenaeum*. "Of the lovely figure of Danaë in 'The Tower of Brass,'" he wrote, "it is impossible to speak too highly. . . . Her face is one of the finest and truest of the painter's designing, and her attitude is most expressive."³ The *Times* used exactly the same word. After observing that there was "so much beauty in [the artist's] designs; so much sincerity in his feeling . . . [and] such a mastery in his treatment of line and colour," its critic continued: "The face of Danaë, for example, is supremely expressive. Knowing the story, we feel the rightness of the painter's interpretation of it. . . . The details, too, are admirable from the point of view of execution; the blue irises at Danaë's feet are lovely, and the artist has seldom painted anything better than the bronze door which falls into such perfect harmony with the rest of the picture."⁴ The picture was bought by the Scottish collector William Connal, who presented it to the Glasgow Art Gallery in 1901.

Like other works of the late 1880s, *The Tower of Brass* has a transitional quality. The setting echoes that of *King Cophetua*

of 1884 (cat. no. 112) and even *The Annunciation* of 1879 (cat. no. 104), but the jagged rhythms of Danaë's drapery, in which all sense of linear suavity has been jettisoned in favor of an exciting visual dissonance, look forward to the abstraction and mannerism that characterize the work of the 1890s. The composition, which is particularly suited, as here, to convey an emotional tension between a foreground figure and small figures in the distance, is one that Burne-Jones had often adopted before, notably for the portrait of his wife and children he started in 1883 (cat. no. 116). His fondness for it is curious in view of his belief that "figures diminished by distance are a bore," and his general practice of keeping them in a single plane. It seems to reflect the impact made on him as a young artist by the portrait of Isabella d'Este at Hampton Court (see illus. on p. 69). Indeed, the persistence of the composition in his later work suggests just how forceful that impact had been.

One of the most notable features of *The Tower of Brass* is the interrelationship between the canvas and the frame, the vaguely Roman architecture within the picture being echoed in the frame's neo-Renaissance design to create a decorative ensemble. This device was exploited by other Victorian artists, notably Frederic Leighton, the only difference being that the architectural forms he favored were Doric and Ionic pilasters and columns. His well-known painting *The Bath of Psyche* (Tate Gallery, London), exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1890, is a good example, and not far from *The Tower of Brass* in date.

Burne-Jones's picture is his outstanding tribute to Marie Spartali (1844–1927), who was the model for the head of Danaë. Marie belonged to the same Anglo-Greek community as the Ionides and Maria Zambaco (cat. no. 49); her father, Michael Spartali, was a wealthy merchant who served for many years as Greek consul general in London. She and her younger sister Christine, who modeled for Whistler's painting *La Princesse du Pays de la Porcelaine* (1863–64; Freer Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.), the centerpiece of the famous Peacock Room created for F. R. Leyland, were acknowledged beauties. The painter Thomas Armstrong recalled the impact they made when they were first seen by artists at a garden party given by the Ionides in the early 1860s. "We were all *à genoux* before them," he wrote, "and of course every one of us burned with a desire to try to paint them."⁵ "Theirs was a lofty beauty," Graham Robertson observed, "gracious and noble; the beauty worshipped in Greece of old, yet with a wistful tenderness of poise." Their looks, he felt, had something in common with those of William Morris's wife, Jane; there was "the same lofty stature, the same long sweep of limb . . . the eyes of mystery." But while Mrs. Morris's beauty was "too grand, too sombre to appeal to every eye," Marie Spartali's was easy to appreciate; he "always recommended would-be but wavering worshippers" to start with her, calling her "Mrs Morris for Beginners."⁶

In addition to being exceptionally good-looking, Marie had two qualities not always found in beauties, sweetness of

character and talent. In the 1860s she studied painting under Ford Madox Brown, and she soon developed a distinct style, producing elaborate watercolors with literary themes that she exhibited regularly at the Grosvenor and the New Gallery. In 1871 she married the American artist, diplomat, and journalist William James Stillman and visited America with him that year. In the late 1870s they settled in Italy, where Stillman pursued his journalistic career and Marie found inspiration for the scenes from Dante, Boccaccio, and Petrarch that she so often painted.

She modeled for many artists in her circle and was photographed on numerous occasions by Julia Margaret Cameron, but her beauty was not easy to capture. Rossetti, who often made the attempt, found her head "about the most difficult I ever drew. It depends not nearly so much on real form as on a subtle charm of life which one cannot recreate."⁷ Whether Burne-Jones found the same difficulty we do not know. He painted an unfinished portrait of her in the 1870s, and she is said to be one of the dancers in *The Mill* (cat. no. 111), but her appearance in *The Tower of Brass* was considered particularly lifelike and characteristic.

[JC]

1. May Morris, ed., *The Collected Works of William Morris* (London, 1910–15), vol. 3 (1910), p. xxiii.
2. Adam, *Mrs. J. Comyns Carr's Reminiscences*, p. 162.
3. *Athenaeum*, May 19, 1888, p. 636.
4. *Times* (London), May 9, 1888, p. 10.
5. Thomas Armstrong, *A Memoir, 1832–1911* (London, 1912), p. 196.
6. Robertson 1931, pp. 13, 95.
7. Letter to Jane Morris, August 14, 1869, British Museum, London; see John Bryson, ed., *Dante Gabriel Rossetti and Jane Morris: Their Correspondence* (Oxford, 1976), p. 20.



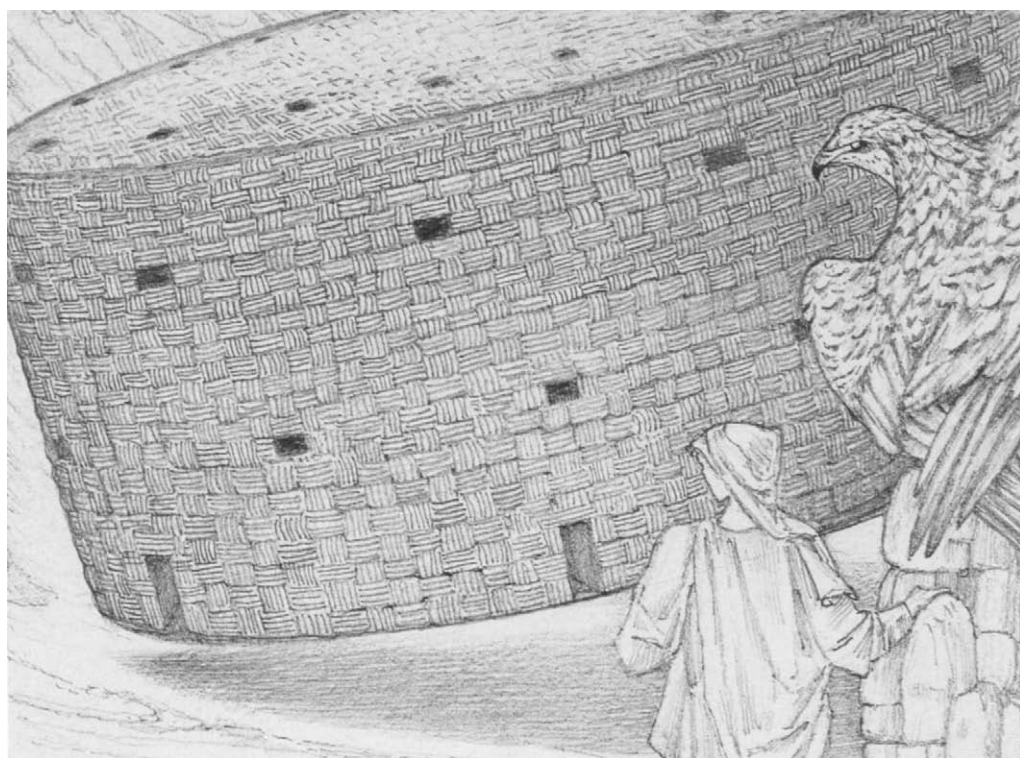
The Artist Craftsman

By the time of the opening of the Grosvenor Gallery in 1877, Burne-Jones had been for two years Morris & Company's sole designer of stained glass (not counting decorative elements). Since 1872 he had produced more than two hundred cartoons for major figure subjects, which had provided a significant and reliable income, even though he constantly had had to chide Morris over his remuneration. Fortuitously, in 1877 Morris founded the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings, and decided not to accept any additional commissions for new glass in old churches. This policy dramatically reduced the call on Burne-Jones for further designs, which now tended to be for domestic settings or for postmedieval buildings, such as Saint Philip's, Birmingham, where one of his final great conceptions, *The Last Judgment*, was installed in 1897.

As Comyns Carr wrote, however, "His spirit lived in the language of design."¹ Opportunities to break free from the rigors of the canvas were eagerly grasped, and many were provided by his close friends and patrons. Burne-Jones had long been interested in the possibilities of decoration offered by the

broad spaces of the piano case, and in the painting of the Orpheus piano (cat. no. 125) for William Graham he produced one of the most spectacular pieces of decorative art of the nineteenth century. For the Perseus series undertaken for Arthur Balfour (cat. nos. 88–97), he had intended four panels to be in gilded gesso, although the exhibition of one of these at the Grosvenor Gallery in 1878 met with the general bafflement usually proffered by English art critics to anything other than easel paintings. Commissions from George Howard for a family memorial (cat. no. 122) and a large and dynamic relief panel, *Flodden Field* (cat. no. 132), both executed by a new sculptor friend, Joseph Boehm, maintained this interest in three-dimensional design.

Moving to bigger workshops at Merton Abbey in 1881, Morris set up tapestry looms, and soon turned for designs to Burne-Jones, who found the medium entirely congenial, "beautifully half way between painting and ornament."² Photography of small cartoons was now standard practice, enabling the artist to husband his energy and yet devise the delightful pastorals *Pomona* and *Flora* (cat. nos. 133, 134), the



Edward Burne-Jones, *The House of Fame: The House of Twiggess*, ca. 1892–95. Pencil, 5¹/₈ x 6³/₄ in. (12.9 x 17.1 cm). Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge (1050-73)

massively grand *Adoration of the Magi* (cat. no. 142), and a series of Holy Grail subjects (cat. nos. 145–151) that provided the culmination of an abiding passion for the Arthurian legend. These were among a range of decorative art shown at the Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society at the New Gallery from 1888 onward, establishing Burne-Jones as a pivotal figure in the burgeoning Arts and Crafts movement.

From John Ruskin there came in 1883 an invitation to design a piece of jewelry, a gold cross for the May Queen at Whitelands College (cat. no. 136), which spurred Burne-Jones on to further creations for his family and friends. Since 1882 he had been relaxing by making roundel watercolors inspired by the names of flowers (gathered together as *The Flower Book*, cat. nos. 135a–d), and by 1885 he seems to have decided to focus this area of decorative invention through the compilation of the “*Secret*” *Book of Designs* (cat. no. 140). This contains scores of ideas that could be translated in any number of ways, bridging the divisions—which Burne-Jones did not recognize anyway—between fine and applied art.

The Kelmscott Press, which proved to be Morris’s last creative

venture, again brought a fruitful collaboration between the two lifelong friends. Although his stimulus was essentially typographical, Morris was concerned that ornament should be an integral feature of the books, and inevitably Burne-Jones was seduced into making designs—more than a hundred in all, for twelve books published between 1892 and 1898. Over many months leading up to its completion in 1896, the two men spent their habitual Sunday mornings together working on the illustrations to the Kelmscott *Chaucer* (cat. no. 154), universally recognized as one of the greatest books to emerge from the private press movement. To the poet and diarist Wilfrid Scawen Blunt, Burne-Jones confessed in October 1896 that “his interest in life had come to an end with Morris, as all their ideas and plans and work had been together all their lives.”³

1. Introduction to New Gallery 1898–99, p. 19.

2. Lago 1981, p. 105 (entry for June 11, 1896).

3. Wilfrid Scawen Blunt, *My Diaries: Being a Personal Narrative of Events, 1888–1914*, 2 vols. (London, 1919–20), 1932 ed., p. 240 (entry for October 5, 1896).



I22

I22. The Nativity

1879
Watercolor, bodycolor, and pastel, $16\frac{1}{4} \times 21\frac{1}{4}$ in. (42.5 x 55.2 cm); central sheet 9 x 16 in. (25.1 x 40.6 cm)
PROVENANCE: Presented by Charles Fairfax Murray, 1908
EXHIBITED: New Gallery 1892–93, no. 154; New Gallery 1898–99, no. 200; Matthiesen Gallery 1991–92, no. 6a; Musée des Beaux-Arts de Nantes 1991–92, no. 19

Lent by the Syndics of the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge (667a)

With its pair, *The Entombment*, this is a design for a monument in Lanercost Priory, Cumbria, commissioned by George Howard in 1879. Commemorating George's parents, the Hon. Charles Howard (see cat. no. 131) and his wife, Mary, it was executed in bronze relief by the sculptor Sir Joseph Edgar Boehm (1834–1890), who also translated Burne-Jones's design of *Flodden Field* (cat. no. 132). The composition is restrained and elegiac, appropriate in that Mary Howard had died giving birth to her son in 1843.

"If ever my eyes grow dim," Burne-Jones once said, "I will give up painting and take to sculpture."¹ This deceptively simple design demonstrates his understanding of the sculptural need to maintain strongly flowing forms; the subtly balanced highlights indicate the chief raised parts of the relief. The artist's bold application of bodycolor and use of a startlingly effective harmony of green and gold constitute a dissociation from simple two-dimensional design toward a kind of decorative art in which he uniquely and instinctively excelled.

1. Noted by Lady Lewis, and quoted by John Christian in Matthiesen Gallery 1991–92, p. 77.

I23. The Planets: Saturn

1879
Black chalk, touched with blue, $32\frac{1}{2} \times 20\frac{1}{8}$ in. (82.5 x 51 cm)
Inscribed: SATURNI PALLIDUM SIDUS (Pale Planet)
PROVENANCE: Holden family; G. H. Earle
Torre Abbey, Torquay (Torbay Borough Council)
NEW YORK AND BIRMINGHAM

I24. The Planets: Evening Star

1879
Black and blue chalk, $32\frac{7}{8} \times 20\frac{1}{8}$ in. (82.3 x 51 cm)
Inscribed: STELLA VESPERTINA (Evening Star)
PROVENANCE: Holden family; G. H. Earle
Torre Abbey, Torquay (Torbay Borough Council)
NEW YORK AND BIRMINGHAM

After the reconstitution of the firm as Morris & Company in 1875, there were to be few occasions on which Burne-Jones could give full rein to his invention in an entirely original set of designs for stained glass, at least of secular subjects. One occasion, however, came in 1878, with a commission from Angus Holden, described in 1885 as "perhaps the most popular gentleman who has ever filled the Mayoral chair at Bradford, and the eldest son of one who is socially, politically and commercially at the head of the Liberals of the West Riding [Yorkshire]."¹

In his new house, Woodlands, in what were then the rural outskirts of Bradford, Holden installed a substantial collection



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of paintings, which included Daniel Maclise's enormous canvas *Bohemian Gypsies* (1837), Edwin Landseer's unpleasant but important *Spearing of the Otter* (1844), and *The Bride of Lammermoor* (1878) by Millais. For the upper compartment of the main window in the music room, which also housed Philip Calderon's painting after Tennyson's "The Princess," *Home They Brought Her Warrior Dead* (1877), Morris & Company provided nine upright panels of stained glass representing the Planets. Sadly, these unusual windows have disappeared, but all the cartoons survive, displaying some of Burne-Jones's most delicate and eloquent draftsmanship. Seven of them are at Torre Abbey, and carry marginal annotations that reveal the sequence at Woodlands: *Morning Star, Jupiter, Mars, Venus, Sun, Earth, Moon, Saturn, Evening Star*; entries in Burne-Jones's account book, between August 18 and November 1, 1878, list the designs at £15 each.²

The two outer subjects are the simplest, the Morning Star and the Evening Star each hovering in the clouds over an ethereal landscape. Burne-Jones had used the image of a draped female figure walking across a darkling sky for two versions of a watercolor under the title *Vesper*, painted in 1870 and 1872, but it is clear that the Woodlands pair derive from more straight-



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forward studio poses, which are indeed to be found (for both figures) in a sketchbook now in the Birmingham collection. By seating all the figures in the Planets series, he allowed himself more space within the limited format of the window embrasure in which to add zodiacal and other appropriate attributes. Saturn is therefore accompanied not only by Aquarius the water carrier but also by a pair of the artist's typical chubby infants, to offset his further identification as the harbinger of old age clasping a scythe. Jupiter is given the companion figure of Sagittarius, Venus has Taurus the bull, and Mars a scorpion (Scorpio) as well as a dog of war. Perhaps the most effective of these allegorical combinations is in the depiction of the Sun as Apollo with his lyre, playing to a lion (Leo). The Moon is shown in female form, in a boat, while for Earth Burne-Jones gives a version of one of his favorite figures—a seated Earth Mother (with the inscription "Terra Omnipartis") pouring the water of life from a jar and watching over an infant playing with a dog; as a small oil painting, *Earth* was exhibited at the Grosvenor Gallery in 1882.

Some of the designs were repeated in stained glass during Burne-Jones's lifetime (a second complete set, made in 1901 for a house in Bournemouth, is presumed to have perished during

the Second World War),³ and reassembled some of the ideas, with new variations, in a set of four large vertical panels, now identified as the Seasons, and probably intended as designs for embroidery.⁴ In these, the figures of Saturn and Mars (as Autumn and Winter, respectively) are largely unaltered, while Apollo and Venus (Spring and Summer) are completely reworked.

1. *Bradford Illustrated Weekly*, 1885; Angus Holden (1833–1912) became a Member of Parliament, inherited a baronetcy, and was later made Baron Holden (information from Bradford Libraries, courtesy of Donald Green).
2. Sewter 1974–75, vol. 2, p. 208. The cartoon for *Evening Star* is at Lady Margaret Hall, Oxford, and *Mars*, overpainted in watercolor, is at the Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery (20'98). Both *Morning Star* and *Evening Star* were turned into small oils on panel, in about 1880 (*Albert Moore and His Contemporaries* [exh. cat., Newcastle upon Tyne: Laing Art Gallery, 1972], nos. 91, 92; sold Sotheby's Belgravia, October 2, 1979, lot 10).
3. *Moon, Earth, Morning Star*, and *Evening Star*, for instance, survive at Thornbridge Hall, Great Longstone, Derbyshire; see Sewter 1974–75, vol. 2, pp. 25, 185.
4. Bell 1892, pp. 102–3, illus.

125.

The Graham Piano

1879–80

Made by John Broadwood and Sons, London

Case of painted wood: height 35 $\frac{5}{8}$ in. (98 cm), width 55 $\frac{7}{8}$ in. (142 cm), length 102 $\frac{1}{2}$ in. (260 cm)

Inscribed: HAS IMAGINES INVENTIT EDVARDVS BVRNE JONES LONDINI

MDCCCLXXIX (Edward Burne Jones devised these images, London 1879)

Provenance: Commissioned by William Graham, 1879

Exhibited: New Gallery 1892–93, no. 160; Arts Council 1975–76, no. 208

Private collection

Designed the story of Orpheus” is one of the many entries for the immensely productive year of 1872, in Burne-Jones’s retrospective record of work. Conceived as illustrations to *The Story of Orpheus and Eurydice*, a poem by William Morris that remained unpublished in his lifetime,¹ these were





125, detail

refined into a sequence of eleven bold but exquisite pencil drawings, all bearing the date 1875 (and all now in the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford). Their roundel format suggests that the artist had in mind a future application for the designs, and he was given the opportunity in 1879, when William Graham commissioned a decorated grand piano for his daughter Frances.

Burne-Jones had been interested in the design and decoration of pianos from an early date and had become dissatisfied with the heavy, bulbous shape of the standard grand, designing one for himself in 1878, with the help of William Benson. This had the simpler, squarer lines of a harpsichord (which he also owned), with plain straight legs and a case stained green.² "I have been wanting for years to reform pianos," he wrote to Kate Faulkner, "since they are as it were the very altar of homes, and a second hearth to people." "I feel as if one might start a new industry in painting them," he continued, "... [and] I should like Broadwood to be venturesome and have a few of the better shape made on speculation, some only stained, not always green, sometimes other colours, and then a few with here and there an ornament well designed and painted, and at

least one covered with ornament, and presently we should see if people would have them or not."³

The successful public exhibition of the Graham piano, both in their warehouse in 1880 and at the International Inventions Exhibition of 1885, led Broadwood's to produce a number of grand pianos with allover naturalistic decoration in gold and silver gesso, carried out by Kate Faulkner to Burne-Jones's designs.⁴ With the exception of the much simpler case for an Arnold Dolmetsch clavichord, painted in 1897,⁵ the Graham piano is Burne-Jones's most elaborate exercise in decorative painting, evoking the luxurious self-indulgence of late Renaissance and Mannerist applied art—appropriate enough as a commission from a connoisseur and collector of Italian Old Masters. On the outside of the lid is the seated figure of a poet, looking up through branches of laurel to his female muse, who delivers a scroll inscribed "ne oublie" [do not forget—the Graham family motto]; a cartouche carries a thirteenth-century Italian poem of the *Dolce Stil Nuovo* school, attributed to Guido Cavalcanti, beginning: "Fresca rosa novella / piacente primavera / per prata e per rivera / gaiamente cantando, / vostro fin pregio



125, detail

mando a la verdura [Fresh new rose, delighting Spring, gaily singing by meadow and bank, I declare your rare gifts to the greenery].”⁶ Inside is one of the most colorful and extraordinary of all Burne-Jones’s decorations, a seated figure of Mother Earth (inscribed “Terra Omniparens”) surrounded by twenty-one chubby putti (three of them naughty imps, with pointed ears) playing among the swirling tendrils of an enormous vine interspersed with briars; a large preparatory chalk cartoon for this is in the Victoria and Albert Museum.⁷ In a delightful additional touch that shows the artist’s infinite capacity for taking pains, flower petals are painted on the sounding board beneath the strings.

Against these images of inspiration and fecundity, the Orpheus roundels seem a little somber, painted in grisaille over green staining. That Burne-Jones went to some trouble, however, to dispose them carefully is demonstrated in a sketchbook, now in the Victoria and Albert Museum, containing first proposals for their arrangement, which were later revised.⁸

The story is of Orpheus, son of the muse Calliope, and his doomed attempt to recover his dead bride, Eurydice. Having charmed Pluto, god of the underworld, by his playing of the lyre, he is granted her return to life provided he does not look back before leaving the infernal regions, a command he fails to obey, losing her forever. Beginning at the end of the straight back panel, the subjects are of Orpheus and Eurydice together (*The Garden*); Eurydice’s death by snakebite (*The Garden Poisoned*, cat. no. 126); *The Gate of Hell*; and the three-headed guard dog, Cerberus (*The Doorkeeper*, cat. no. 127). Over the keyboard are twin images of Orpheus and Eurydice (*Across the Flames*), and on the right-hand end is the larger scene of Orpheus playing to Pluto and Persephone (*The House of Pluto*, cat. no. 128). Then come three images of Orpheus leading Eurydice away, called *The Regained Lost*: as he looks behind, she slips away from his grasp, back into death. The rear end of the case, *The Death of Orpheus*, which also bears inscriptions, shows Orpheus slain by the women of Thrace. There exist a number of preparatory studies for the roundels, including a pencil design for *The House of Pluto* (Tate Gallery, London)

and a chalk drawing for *The Death of Orpheus* (Royal Watercolour Society, London).

1. The poem was eventually published in May Morris’s edition of *The Collected Works of William Morris*, 24 vols. (London, 1910–15), vol. 24 (1915).
2. See Wilson 1972, pp. 140–46, and Wilson 1975.
3. *Memorials*, vol. 2, p. III.
4. One of these pianos is in the Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery (reproduced in Wilson 1972, fig. 15); another, in silver and gold, belongs to the Victoria and Albert Museum (Victoria and Albert Museum 1996, no. J.31).
5. The clavichord paintings are reproduced in Vallance 1900, p. 24.
6. Translation by George R. Kay, *The Penguin Book of Italian Verse* (Harmondsworth, 1965), p. 58.
7. Victoria and Albert Museum, E.690-1896, reproduced in Wilson 1972, fig. 12.
8. The relevant page of the sketchbook (E.7-1955), which includes other studies for the piano’s decoration, is reproduced in *ibid.*, fig. 14.

126.

The Garden Poisoned

1875

Pencil, 9¼ x 9½ in. (24.7 x 24.3 cm)

Signed and dated: EBJ 1875

Visitors of the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford (1926.22)

BIRMINGHAM AND PARIS





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127.

The Doorkeeper

Pencil, 9 $\frac{3}{8}$ x 9 $\frac{3}{8}$ in. (24.4 x 24.3 cm)

Signed and dated: EBJ 1875

Visitors of the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford (1926.24)

BIRMINGHAM AND PARIS

128.

Orpheus and Eurydice: The House of Pluto

Pencil, 9 x 20 in. (23 x 51 cm)

Signed and dated: EBJ 1875 EBJ 1879

PROVENANCE: Bequeathed by Sir Philip Burne-Jones, 1926, in fulfillment of the artist's wishes



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EXHIBITED: New Gallery, London, 1888, nos. 281–90; Fine Art Society 1896; Burlington Fine Arts Club 1899, nos. 51, 53, 56

Visitors of the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford (1926.27)

BIRMINGHAM AND PARIS

129.

Poesis

1880

Embroidery, silk on cotton, 102 $\frac{3}{8}$ x 42 $\frac{1}{2}$ in. (260 x 108 cm)

Inscribed: POESIS ORPHEVS (Poetry / Orpheus)

PROVENANCE: Believed sent by command of Princess (later Queen)

Alexandra to the Melbourne International Exhibition, to be sold for

charity; Mrs. Ross-Goden, Mandeville Hall, Melbourne; purchased 1992

EXHIBITED: International Exhibition, Melbourne, 1880

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne. Purchased through the Art

Foundation of Victoria, with the assistance of the late Miss Flora

MacDonald Anderson and the late Mrs. Ethel Elizabeth Ogilvy

Lumsden, Founder Benefactors, 1992 (CTI/1992)

In 1872 the Royal School of Art Needlework was founded by Madeline Wyndham, one of the circle of aesthetically minded aristocrats whose company and support were of lasting importance to Burne-Jones. The school had both an educational and a commercial purpose—it submitted work to the Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia in 1876—and a number of leading artists were recruited as teachers or designers, including Morris, Poynter, Walter Crane, and Selwyn Image (1849–1930), as well as Burne-Jones. In 1881 G. F. Watts was persuaded to write a testimonial article in the magazine *Nineteenth Century*, in which he admitted that “an amount of perfection has been reached, for which I was by no means prepared.”¹

Burne-Jones was thus happy to provide designs, content in the knowledge that the work carried out would be no mere



amateurish copy, but of a high standard in a medium that was responsive to his own interest in the combination of line and color. His two major designs were *Poesis* and *Musica*, both adopting the flat linear patterns of the *Song of Solomon* drawings (cat. nos. 82, 83) within a hieratic, two-dimensional composition of superimposed figures. *Musica* has a balancing design, in which a young girl holds open a book for the player of an ancient violin. This was illustrated in a series of articles entitled "Art Needlework," which appeared in the *Magazine of Art* in 1880, as a design "sui generis for the needle," though executed in brown crewel on linen.² Apart from two versions of *Poesis*—one made for the Wyndhams' country house, Clouds, and the present one now in Melbourne—the most spectacular colored embroidery made from a Burne-Jones design is the huge panel *Love* (see cat. no. 130), worked in the early 1880s by Frances Horner for the church at Mells, Somerset. She also made smaller embroideries after designs provided by Burne-Jones, including a figure of Ruth.

A preliminary pencil study for *Poesis* is at Birmingham,³ and full-size cartoons for both this and *Musica*, possibly worked up in color by Charles Fairfax Murray, were in the Wyndham family collection until the Clouds sale of June 1933.⁴

1. Quoted in Caroline Dakers, *Clouds: The Biography of a Country House* (New Haven, 1993), p. 40.
2. *Magazine of Art*, 1880, p. 430, illus. p. 180. Another panel in crewelwork after Burne-Jones, *The Musicians*, is in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London (Victoria and Albert Museum 1996, no. M.17).
3. Birmingham collection 1939, p. 131 (190'04; 13½ x 9¾ in.).
- 4.

4. Both approximately $78\frac{3}{4} \times 39\frac{3}{4}$ in. (200 x 100 cm); the cartoon for *Poesis* reappeared at Sotheby's, June 23, 1981, lot 94 (see Dakers, *Clouds*, p. 41, fig. 22).

130.

Love

ca. 1880

Watercolor and bodycolor, 83 x 42 in. (211 x 107 cm)

Inscribed: L'AMOR CHE MUOVE IL SOLE E L'ALTRE STELLE (*The love that moves the sun and the other stars*)
EXHIBITED: Fourth Arts and Crafts Exhibition, New Gallery, London, 1893, no. 104; Arts Council 1975-76, no. 212

Victoria and Albert Museum,
London (E.838-1937)
NEW YORK AND BIRMINGHAM

A full-size embroidery of this image of Love, worked by Frances Horner and exhibited at the Fifth Arts and Crafts Exhibition in 1896, is now in Saint Andrew's Church in the village of Mells, Somerset, where the Horner family owned the Manor House. A cartoon of the same size exists in pencil,¹ and the present work is presumably painted over another, perhaps intended for the Royal School of Art Needlework.

The inscription identifies this image as Dante's vision of Love, the line being the last in *Il Paradiso*, the third book of the *Divina Commedia*. Both the undulating wave motif in the background and doves of peace reinforce the heavenly setting, while the group of children and lush floral foreground provide earthly echoes of an earlier large-scale watercolor, *Charity*, painted in 1867 (private collection).

1. Sold at Christie's, October 29, 1985, lot 182; subsequently with Peter Nahum, London.



The Pelican in Her Piety

1880

*Colored chalks and gold, 68 x 22½ in. (172.7 x 57.2 cm)**PROVENANCE: Presented by Sir Frank Brangwyn, 1934**EXHIBITED: Arts Council 1975–76, no. 202**William Morris Gallery, Walthamstow (London Borough of Waltham Forest; BRA136)*

This celebrated design forms a focal point of one of Morris & Company's finest works in stained glass, the east window of Saint Martin's Church, Brampton, Cumbria (fig. 13). After founding the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings in 1877, Morris was averse to putting new glass into medieval churches, and the number of major projects after this date was necessarily limited. The ten windows at Brampton are therefore exceptional, forming an inspirational link with the client and architect that had rarely been achieved since the firm's heyday in the 1860s. The new church at Brampton was designed in 1875 by Morris's old friend Philip Webb, and consecrated in 1878; it was under the patronage of the Earls of Carlisle, whose country house, Naworth Castle, is nearby.

Charles Howard, the father of Burne-Jones's patron George Howard (see cat. nos. 40a–1), led the campaign for rebuilding the church, and on his death in 1879, the east window was nominated as his memorial, Morris determining that it should consist of entirely new designs: three tiers of subjects in the five-light window, making fifteen figures in all. In a letter of August 27, 1880, to George Howard, he described how "the lower part of the centre light is filled with a 'Pelican in her piety', i.e. the bird tearing her breast to feed her young; this legend from the bestiaries having made the pelican one of the types of Christ. On the south side of this symbol stands first St. Dorothy clad in purple and blue and next St. George in red golden armour; on the north side are first the Virgin Mary clad all [in] varying shades of blue and next St. Martin in the act of dividing his cloak with the beggar, his armour is coppery in hue, and his cloak crimson. The whole background of the window is a diaper of flowers of the deepest colours and much broken mosaic-fashion."¹ At the apex of the center light, above the Pelican, is a figure of Christ as the Good Shepherd, with two angelic minstrels on each side and in the middle tier below a series of five smaller angels with scrolls.²

A later letter to George Howard recorded Morris's relief "that you think the east window a success; I was very nervous about it, as the cartoons were so good that I should have been quite upset if I had not done them something like justice."³ This remark is ironic in the context of one of Burne-Jones's bitter entries in his account book, under May 1880: "To Brampton window—a colossal work of fifteen subjects—a masterpiece of style, a chef d'oeuvre of invention, a capo d'opera of conception—fifteen compartments—a Herculean labour—



hastily estimated in a moment of generous friendship for £200, if the firm regards as binding a contract made from a noble impulse, and in a mercenary spirit declines to re-open the question, it must remain—but it will remain equally a monument of art and ingratitude—£200.”⁴

The figures of Saint Martin and Saint George (Burne-Jones's first remodeling of the latter saint for stained glass since the Peterhouse design of 1871; see cat. no. 85) became two of the firm's most popular representations, both being repeated over forty times up until the 1920s; the cartoon for Saint George and those for the Good Shepherd and the five angels with scrolls are in the Carlisle Museum and Art Gallery.⁵

Much has been made of the Pelican design, particularly the swirling tree trunk that supports the nest, as an influence and prototype for the international style now known as Art Nouveau. Even before its citation in Stephan Tschudi Madsen's seminal study, *Sources of Art Nouveau* (Oslo, 1956), it had been picked out by Nikolaus Pevsner, along with the title page to A. H. Mackmurdo's *Wren's City Churches* (1883), for illustration in *Pioneers of the Modern Movement*, from William Morris to Walter Gropius, first published in 1936. Burne-Jones had made no sudden breakthrough into modern design, however, for what Madsen called his “serpentine linearism” was just a slightly more radical example of his constant fascination with the conversion of organic form—drapery, wing, or plant—into a satisfying and energetic two-dimensional arrangement. A similar linear malleability is evident in the twisting tree trunk in *The Beguiling of Merlin* (1873–74; cat. no. 64), while equal forms of abstracted naturalism may be found in other decorative designs, such as dynamic sketches in the “Secret” *Book of Designs*, dating from the 1880s (cat. no. 140).

1. Quoted in Arthur Penn, *Brampton Church and Its Windows* (Brampton, 1993), pp. 58–60.
2. See Sewter 1974–75, vol. 1, pl. 548, vol. 2, pp. 29–30.
3. Penn, *Brampton Church*, p. 60.
4. Sewter 1974–75, vol. 2, p. 30.
5. Ibid., vol. 1, pls. 549–54.

I32.

Flodden Field

1882

Watercolor, bodycolor, gold and silver paint, 20½ x 39¼ in. (52 x 100 cm)

Signed: EBJ

PROVENANCE: Artist's estate; David Greig; Sotheby's, June 15, 1982, lot 107; Peter Nahum; purchased 1996

EXHIBITED: Peter Nahum 1993, no. 22; *De l'Impressionisme à l'Art nouveau*, Musée d'Orsay, Paris, 1996–97

Musée d'Orsay, Paris (R.F. 50825)

Realizing that Burne-Jones was unlikely ever to complete *The Sleep of Arthur in Avalon* (fig. 107), originally intended to hang in the library at Naworth Castle, Cumbria, his friend and patron George Howard instead commissioned in 1882 a scene of the Battle of Flodden. Commemorated in Sir Walter Scott's long narrative poem *Marmion*, the battle of 1513 ended an attempt by James IV of Scotland to weaken the forces of Henry VIII in advance of England's war with France. Within



Burne-Jones's brilliantly stylized composition, James IV is seen falling mortally wounded on the right, while George's ancestor Thomas Howard leads the victorious charge.

Burne-Jones would have been familiar with the celebrated battle scenes of Uccello and Michelangelo, and the linear possibilities of massed ranks of horsemen or soldiers, with their spears and banners, were explored several times by the artist, from early ink drawings (cat. no. 6) and stained-glass designs (cat. no. 21) to the Holy Grail tapestry *The Arming and Departure of the Knights* (cat. no. 147) and the huge oil *The Fall of Lucifer* (1894; Lord Lloyd-Webber). In the most elaborate modello for *The Sleep of Arthur in Avalon* (dated 1894; Kōriyama Museum of Art, Japan), two similar groups of battling armies flank the central depiction of the wounded king, although this idea was taken no further.

The unearthly cold blue tonality of the design echoes the Perseus series (cat. nos. 88–97), in which four subjects were to be executed in wood and gesso. *Flodden Field* was also conceived as a painted plaster relief (preserved at Naworth Castle; another cast is in the Carlisle Art Gallery), carved by the sculptor Joseph Boehm, whom Burne-Jones greatly liked. It was finally dispatched in 1886, Burne-Jones exhorting Howard, who was a more-than-competent artist, "You will touch up Flodden in situ, won't you, finishing the banners, tipping objects with beautiful touches."¹

1. Quoted in Virginia Surtees, *The Artist and the Autocrat: George and Rosalind Howard, Earl and Countess of Carlisle* (Salisbury, 1988), p. 130.

133.

Pomona

1884–85

Wool and silk tapestry on cotton warp, 122 x 82½ in. (300 x 210 cm); executed by Morris & Company

Inscribed at top: I am the ancient apple-queen—as once I was so am I now / for evermore a hope unseen—betwixt the blossom and the bough; at bottom: Ah, where's the river's hidden Gold—and where's the windy grave of Troy? / once come I as I came of old—from out the heart of summer's joy

PROVENANCE: Purchased by the Whitworth Institute, Manchester, 1887

EXHIBITED: Royal Jubilee Exhibition, Manchester, 1887; Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery 1981, no. T3

The Whitworth Art Gallery, University of Manchester (18354)

William Morris set up his first tapestry loom in 1877, in his bedroom at Kelmscott House, and taught himself the technique of weaving. Choosing the haute-lisse, or upright loom, in which the weaver faces the back of the tapestry and guides the shuttle through the warp threads with the aid of a mirror, he completed his first experimental tapestry in

September 1879, a symmetrical pattern of acanthus and vine inspired by French and Flemish "large-leaf" verdure tapestries of the sixteenth century.¹

At the Merton Abbey Works, to which Morris & Company moved in June 1881, looms were set up for tapestry (as well as carpet) weaving, to be executed by young male apprentices under the direction of John Henry Dearle, who had previously served in the glass-painting studio. It soon became evident to Morris that he would need to rely on Burne-Jones as a designer to the same degree as with the firm's stained glass, and payments of £25 each for the designs of *Pomona* and *Flora* (cat. no. 134) appear in the artist's account book for December 1882 and January 1883. These were clearly small-scale cartoons for the figures alone, as a letter of February 28, 1883, from Morris to his daughter Jenny reports that "Uncle Ned has done me two lovely figures for tapestry, but I have got to design a background for them: I shall probably bring them down [to Kelmscott Manor] next time I come for my holiday task."²

Two colored designs in the Pierpont Morgan Library, New York (1975.46), and at Wightwick Manor, Staffordshire, must represent Morris's completion of that task, copying Burne-Jones's limpid figures onto backgrounds combining his favorite vigorous acanthus with carnations, violets, and other bright flowers, the whole set off by borders of vines and roses. It became the usual workshop practice to photograph the designs to full size, make a tracing, and place it against the warp, keeping the original to hand for reference.³ At that stage, revisions of detail would have been made, including the addition of birds and animals to *Flora* and the substitution of Morris's own verse for the Latin inscriptions.⁴ The tapestries were made in 1884–85 by the firm's three leading weavers, William Knight, William Sleath, and John Martin. *Flora* was repeated in 1888, and both designs were reproduced several times on a smaller scale, with a more stylized floral background by Dearle and without the verses.⁵ An embroidery of *Flora* was also executed at the Royal School of Art Needlework in the late 1880s.

Flora and *Pomona* exemplify Morris's vision for the revival of tapestry weaving, involving artist and craftsman working together, as expressed in his essay of 1888, "Textiles": "As in all wall-decoration, the first thing to be considered in the designing of Tapestry is the force, purity and elegance of the *silhouette* of the object represented, and nothing vague or indeterminate is admissible. . . . Depth of tone, richness of colour, and exquisite gradation of tints are easily to be obtained in Tapestry; and it also demands that crispness and abundance of beautiful detail which was the especial characteristic of fully developed Mediaeval Art."⁶

1. Now at Kelmscott Manor (Society of Antiquaries of London); Victoria and Albert Museum 1996, no. M.115. A similarly bold running acanthus background appears in the tapestry *The Forest*, woven in 1887 (Victoria and Albert Museum; *ibid.*, no. M.120).

2. Morris, *Letters*, vol. 2a, 1881–1884 (1987), p. 160.

3. See Parry 1983, pp. 104–5.

i am the ancient apple-queen · as once i was so am i now ·
for evermore a hope un~~seen~~ · betwixt the blossom and the bough ·



ah where's the river's hidden gold · and where the windy grave of troy ·
yet come i as i came of old · from out the heart of summers joy ·



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4. The verses were published in *Poems by the Way* (1891), along with others written specifically for tapestries. Very similar exotic birds occur in a watercolor tapestry design by Morris, dated to 1879–81, in the Victoria and Albert Museum (Victoria and Albert Museum 1996, no. M.117).
5. See Parry 1983, p. 186; there are small *Pomona* panels in the Art Institute of Chicago and in the Victoria and Albert Museum (Victoria and Albert Museum 1996, no. M.126).
6. “Introductory Notes to the Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society,” in *Catalogue of the First Exhibition* (London, 1888), p. 16; reprinted in *Arts and Crafts Essays by Members of the Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society* (London, 1893), pp. 23–24.

134. Flora

1884–85

Wool and silk tapestry on cotton warp, 122 x 82½ in. (300 x 210 cm); executed by Morris & Company

Inscribed at top: *I am the handmaid of the earth—I broider fair her glorious gown / and deck her on her days of mirth—with many a garland of renown; at bottom: and while earth's little ones are fain—and all about the mother's hem / I scatter every gift I gain—from sun and wind to gladden them*

PROVENANCE: Purchased by the Whitworth Institute, Manchester, 1887

EXHIBITED: Royal Jubilee Exhibition, Manchester, 1887; Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery 1981, no. T2

The Whitworth Art Gallery, University of Manchester (T8353)

135.

The Flower Book

1882–98

38 designs (26 remaining in album) in watercolor, bodycolor, and gold, each 6½ in. (16.5 cm) in diameter

Shown: (a) *Star of Bethlehem* (xxi; Birmingham only); (b) *Helen's Tears* (xxvi; not in exhibition); (c) *Arbor Tristis* (xxix; Birmingham only); (d) *Rose of Heaven* (v; not in exhibition)

PROVENANCE: Presented by Lady Burne-Jones, 1909

EXHIBITED: New Gallery 1892–93, no. 166; Burlington Fine Arts Club 1899, pp. 46–48; Arts Council 1975–77, no. 318

Trustees of the British Museum, London (1909–5–12)

In 1882, Georgiana later recorded, “Edward began the most soothing piece of work that he ever did. He describes it in his List as ‘a series of illustrations to the names of flowers,’ and that is the point of it—the names: not a single flower itself appears. The pictures are circular water-colours six inches in diameter, and the first one is ‘Love in a Mist,’ representing Love as a youth caught by a swirling cloud with which he struggles helplessly. During sixteen years thirty-eight designs were made at irregular intervals.”¹ The format is an extension of the later Orpheus roundels (cat. no. 128), and that Burne-Jones took some trouble over this seemingly informal work is clear from the survival of a number of trial designs.²

The finished watercolors were published in facsimile in 1905 as *The Flower Book*, the Fine Art Society employing Henri Piazza to produce such a superb piece of color printing that examples are still commonly identified as original works. In the Introduction, Georgie recalls Burne-Jones “keeping a list of beautiful names that he had met with & choosing subjects amongst them from time to time according to his mood,” each in the form of “a kind of magic mirror in which the vision appears.”³ Early on, he enlisted the help of Eleanor Leighton (Lady Leighton Warren) in providing ideas: “Pray send me as many names as ever you can,” he wrote, “for alack it is not one in ten that I can use. Of course I could make pictures to all, but I want the name and the picture to be one soul together, and indissoluble, as if they could not exist apart; so many lovely names and nothing to be done with them . . . it is not enough to illustrate them—that is such poor work: I want to add to them or wring their secret from them. They are such rest to do and such delight.”⁴

A good number of the watercolors were done during relaxing days at North End House, Rottingdean, “bearing witness,” in Georgie’s words, “to the way in which the surrounding landscape sank into his soul.”⁵ Landscape elements abound, even including fields and hillsides within this tiny compass; he was particularly fond of the cornfield motif (which allowed plentiful use of gold paint), as in *Flower of God* (vi) and *Saturn’s Loathing* (xxx), which led to an independent treatment of *Sun Ripening Corn* in watercolor (Tate Gallery, London). Many of the images reflect favorite themes and compositions: *Golden*



135a



135b

Cup (vii) and *Honor's Prize* (xxxii) include the Holy Grail; *Witches' Tree* (xv) is another treatment of *The Beguiling of Merlin* (cat. no. 64); *Golden Shower* (xviii) reveals Danaë inside her brazen tower; and *Meadow Sweet* (xxxv) combines the ship from *The Sirens* (cat. no. 157) with the central figures of *Arthur in Avalon* (fig. 107). There is much new invention, however, the Botticellian *Rose of Heaven* (v) floating serenely with her attendant doves, and *Helen's Tears* (xxv) extending the imagery of the story of Troy. The ghostly *Arbor Tristis* (xxviii), the only

flower picture without figures, which shows the Crucifixion tree surrounded by a dark city wall pierced by points of harsh orange light, reveals the artist's melancholy imagination.

1. *Memorials*, vol. 2, p. 118.
2. First attempts at *Key of Spring* (xi) and *Welcome to the House* (xxxi) were sold at Sotheby's, November 22, 1988, lot 68.
3. Introduction, in *Flower Book* 1905, unpaginated.
4. *Memorials*, vol. 2, p. 119.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 124.



135c



135d

London and Ryder, after Edward Burne-Jones
136.

The Whitlands Cross

1883

Gold (four colors), in original heart-shaped case

PROVENANCE: Presented to Edith Martindale, May Queen of
Whitlands College, 1883

Mrs. P. G. Campbell, on loan to the British Museum, London

NOT IN EXHIBITION

Carlo Giuliano (d. 1895), after Edward Burne-Jones
137.

Brooch in the form of a bird on an olive branch

ca. 1890

Gold with green and red enamel, set with turquoise and coral cabochons,
pearls, and a single ruby

Stamped: C. G.

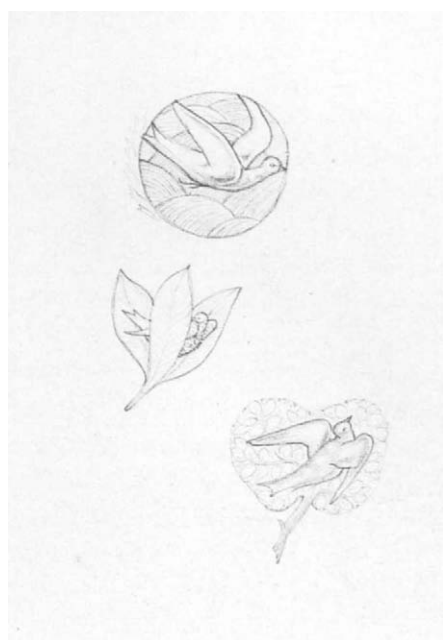
Private collection, London



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Burne-Jones's experiments in three-dimensional art were unusually varied: there exist studies for embroidered shoes (1877) as well as for the seal of the University of Wales (1894), and in 1895 he designed the scenery and costumes for Henry Irving's production of Comyns Carr's stage play *King Arthur*.¹ The design of jewelry was a natural development of his interests, and was first stimulated by Ruskin, in his role as the benefactor of female education. In 1877 Ruskin's support had been sought by John Faunthorpe, the Principal of

Whitlands College, a teacher training institution then in Chelsea, and the initial gift of books was expanded in 1881 into the inauguration of a May Queen festival, at which the student thought by her peers the "likeablest and loveablest" (Ruskin's phrase) would be presented with a gold cross.² This would carry a motif of hawthorn blossom, appropriate not only for the season and in symbolizing hope in the Victorian language of flowers, but also carrying an association for Ruskin with his beloved Rose la Touche, who "has gone," he had written on her



Edward Burne-Jones. Design for bird brooch,
from *The "Secret" Book of Designs*, ca. 1890.
Pencil, sheet 14 $\frac{3}{4}$ x 11 $\frac{7}{8}$ in. (37.4 x 30 cm).
British Museum, London



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death in 1875, “to where the hawthorn blossoms go.”³ Unhappy with the first attempts, Ruskin asked Burne-Jones to design the cross for 1883, presumably aware of the artist’s similar attraction to the flower (see cat. no. 64). The commission gave Burne-Jones a surprising amount of trouble, as a letter of April reveals: “You don’t know how hard I find that little cross to do—I think I have made fifty designs—but yesterday I chose 3 for you—and I want you to say which you like best.”⁴ From these designs (now in the Pierpont Morgan Library, New York), Ruskin chose the square Roman cross with its intertwining branches, which was cleverly executed by London and Ryder. It was presented to Edith Martindale at the May Queen ceremony by Georgiana Burne-Jones, on Ruskin’s behalf. Strangely, it was considered “not hawthorny enough” by the recipient’s botanist father, a view which Ruskin must have conceded, as the design for future crosses was entrusted to Arthur Severn, the artist husband of Ruskin’s cousin Joan.⁵

It is likely that in preparation for this design, Burne-Jones returned to copies of Byzantine and medieval jewels which he seems to have made in earlier sketchbooks. These appear alongside studies from nature, and may well have been prompted, as Charlotte Gere and Geoffrey Munn have suggested, by reproductions of medieval stylized floral decoration in Ruskin’s *Stones of Venice*.⁶ This was the kind of simplified decorative form which inspired Burne-Jones’s subsequent designs for jewelry. He was always fascinated by rich marble and precious stones, on one occasion giving to Frances Horner his thoughts about individual jewels: “Sapphire is truth and I am never without it. . . . Ruby is passion and I need it not. . . . And topaz is jealousy, and is right nasty. . . . Pras is a wicked little jewel—have none of him. I gave one to Margaret, and it winked and blinked and looked so evil, she put it away. And I got her a moonstone that she might never know love, and stay with me. It did no good but it was wonderful to look at—cold and desolate—and you sighed when you looked at it as when you look at the moon.”⁷ These would have been kept in the heart-shaped leather jewel box, tooled with golden willow boughs, which was a wedding present to his daughter, Margaret, in September 1888.⁸

The “*Secret*” *Book of Designs* (cat. no. 140), begun in 1885, shows on its final pages many designs for brooches and pendants, including the first idea for a design described by Georgie: “I only remember one thing which he carefully and completely designed and saw executed, a brooch, representing a dove, made of pink coral and turquoise, surrounded by olive-branches of green enamel.”⁹ Of this there are at least two other versions than catalogue number 137: one belonged to Margaret Burne-Jones, and another was owned by Laura Lyttelton (née Tennant), who bequeathed it to Frances Horner’s daughter Cicely.¹⁰ Other jewelry almost certainly made to Burne-Jones’s design includes a group of brooches in the form of enameled wings with a central stone, made by the firm of Child and Child.¹¹

1. Arts Council 1975–76, nos. 213, 222, and Poulson 1986, pp. 21–24.
2. See Malcolm Cole, “*Be like daisies*”: *John Ruskin and the Cultivation of Beauty at Whitelands College*, Ruskin Lecture 1992, St. Albans, 1992.
3. Quoted in Gere and Munn 1989, p. 126.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 131.
5. In a letter from Ruskin to Joan Severn, January 1884; *ibid.*, p. 133.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 134. Other designs for jewelry in the Byzantine style appear in a sketchbook now in the Pierpont Morgan Library, New York; see Art Gallery of Ontario 1993–94, p. 223, fig. 1–1.
7. *Memorials*, vol. 2, pp. 223–24.
8. Reproduced in Gere and Munn 1989, colorpl. 69.
9. *Memorials*, vol. 2, p. 132; the design (British Museum, 1899–7–13–543, one of three on the sheet) is reproduced in Vallance 1900, fig. 21, and additional studies relating to the brooch are in a sketchbook at the Victoria and Albert Museum (Gere and Munn 1989, pl. 81).
10. Gere and Munn 1989, p. 138. On Laura Lyttelton’s death in childbirth in 1886, Burne-Jones designed an elegant memorial tablet for the church at Mells, depicting a peacock perched on a sarcophagus (fig. 100).
11. *Ibid.*, p. 149, colorpl. 71.

138.

Odin

1883

Black chalk, 71¼ x 28 in. (180.8 x 71 cm)

Inscribed: ASGARD

PROVENANCE: Second studio sale, Christie’s, June 5, 1919; bequeathed by J. R. Holliday, 1927

Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery (1927P409)

NEW YORK AND BIRMINGHAM

In 1883 William Morris was approached to make stained glass for Vinland mansion, built in Newport, Rhode Island, for Catherine Lorillard Wolfe. After consulting Burne-Jones, Morris suggested subjects connected with the Norse voyagers to America (which they had called Vinland) and proposed “Odin Thor and Frey the 3 great Gods above the adventurers of Vinland.”¹ He drew on his extensive knowledge of the Norse saga to recommend the choice of Thorfinn Karlsefne, his wife Gudridr, and Leif the Lucky, son of Erik the Red. These were the figures that duly appeared in two tiers on the staircase window, with three smaller panels above, two with inscriptions on scrolls flanking a Viking ship.²

Morris’s interest came naturally to a self-confessed “man of the North,”³ but Burne-Jones was equally steeped in the stories and iconography of Norse mythology. For such a commission it was his practice to go to some lengths to get the details right, and here he invested his magnificently brooding cartoons with the proper atmosphere and associations. Odin, the northern equivalent of Jove, is shown as “the All-Father, the Wanderer of Wagner’s Nibelungen cycle, with his two wolves, Geri and Freki, at his feet, and the two ravens, Hugin and Munin, perched upon his shoulder, the cap of darkness drawn down over his missing eye, and in his hands the magic spear that Siegfried shattered.”⁴ This was the center panel of the window, with Thor on the left, armed with his mallet and thunderbolts,



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and Frey, goddess of the harvest, on the right. Asgard, which appears in the background of all three designs, looking rather more like Camelot, was the home of the Norse gods.

The job evoked one of Burne-Jones's acid comments in his account book with the firm, under January 1884: "To six Norsemen—gods & heroes—price not originally fixed, but



Morris & Company, designed by Edward Burne-Jones, *Viking Ship*, 1884. Stained glass. Delaware Art Museum, Wilmington

left to a shifting principle termed honour—this combined with sudden outburst of social views on subject of property has made of this contract something I would sooner not dwell upon now. After a scene of great pain to me price fixed at £25 each £150. For same set, a smaller design of Ship. Norse heroes on the sea making for other peoples property. £15."⁵ This sarcastic note was written at a time when Morris was deeply involved in the Socialist movement, but it may also refer to a disagreement over ownership of the cartoons, which Morris may have been insisting on, against Burne-Jones's expectation—in view of the by now almost nominal recompense—to make of them independent and salable works of art, as he had previously done in exhibition at the Grosvenor Gallery. All six of the main cartoons are in the Birmingham collection, and that for the *Viking Ship* is in the Carlisle Museum and Art Gallery.⁶ The glass itself was removed from *Vinland* in 1934 and the panels dispersed; Leif the Lucky was known to be in an American private collection in 1975, and the *Viking Ship* is now in the Delaware Art Museum, Wilmington.

1. William Morris, letter to an unidentified recipient (possibly the architect of *Vinland*), April 11, 1883, in Morris, *Letters*, vol. 2a, 1881–1884 (1987), p. 182 (for further correspondence on the commission, see pp. 208, 422–25). Morris met Miss Wolfe in London on July 21, 1883, and although she ordered an embroidery from the firm, he was "sorry to say that she is sadly stupid, and I believe monstrously rich."
2. Sewter 1974–75, vol. 2, pp. 224–25; another four-light window, in the library, was made in 1884 to designs by Walter Crane (apart from two small minstrel figures, his only stained glass for Morris & Company).
3. Wilfrid Scawen Blunt, *My Diaries*, 2d ed. (London, 1932), p. 229.
4. Bell 1892 (1898), p. 69.
5. Sewter 1974–75, vol. 2, p. 224.
6. Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery (408–410'27, 1134–1136'270); the cartoons for Thor, Odin, and Frey are reproduced in *ibid.*, vol. 1, pls. 564–66, and that for the *Viking Ship*, pl. 562. The stained-glass panel of the *Viking Ship* is reproduced in Morris, *Letters*, vol. 2a, 1881–1884 (1987), p. 423.



139 (1)



139 (2)

139.

The Quest for the Sangreal

1885–86

Four stained-glass panels, each 18 x 13 in. (46 x 33 cm)

Inscribed: (1) how lancelet sought the sangreal and might not see it because his eyes were blinded by such love as dwelleth in kings' houses (2) how gawaine sought the sangreal and might not see it because his eyes were blinded by thoughts of the deeds of kings (3) how galahad sought the sangreal and found it because his heart was single so he followed it to sarras the city of the spirit (4) how the sangreal abideth in a far country which is sarras the city of the spirit

PROVENANCE: Presented by Sir Philip Burne-Jones, 1920

Victoria and Albert Museum, London (C.623, 624, 625, 626–1920)

These panels were made in 1886 by Morris & Company for Burne-Jones's second home, North End House, at

Rottingdean, near Brighton, of which he took possession toward the end of 1880.¹ The peaceful setting provided a place of relaxation for the artist and his family and also had a studio, where he could work on more informal things. As Georgie recalled, "Many a picture in the Flower-book [cat. nos. 135a–d] bears witness to the way in which the surrounding landscape sank into his soul: the 'little grey church on the windy hill' and the village-pond occur continually in his ephemeral drawings."²

The choice of subject from the Arthurian legend harks back to the Tristram and Iseult windows of 1862, which were among the first pieces of the Morris firm's domestic stained glass, and to which Burne-Jones had contributed four subjects; this had included King Arthur and Sir Launcelot, but in a panel designed by Morris himself.³ Although Malory's *Morte*



139 (3)

d'Arthur had meant so much to Morris and Burne-Jones in their youth, after *Merlin and Nimue* (1861; cat. no. 15) and its reworking as *The Beguiling of Merlin* (1873–74; cat. no. 64), only rarely did the artist have any occasion to treat the story, the 1870 glass panels *Launcelot and Elaine* (cat. no. 45) providing one instance.

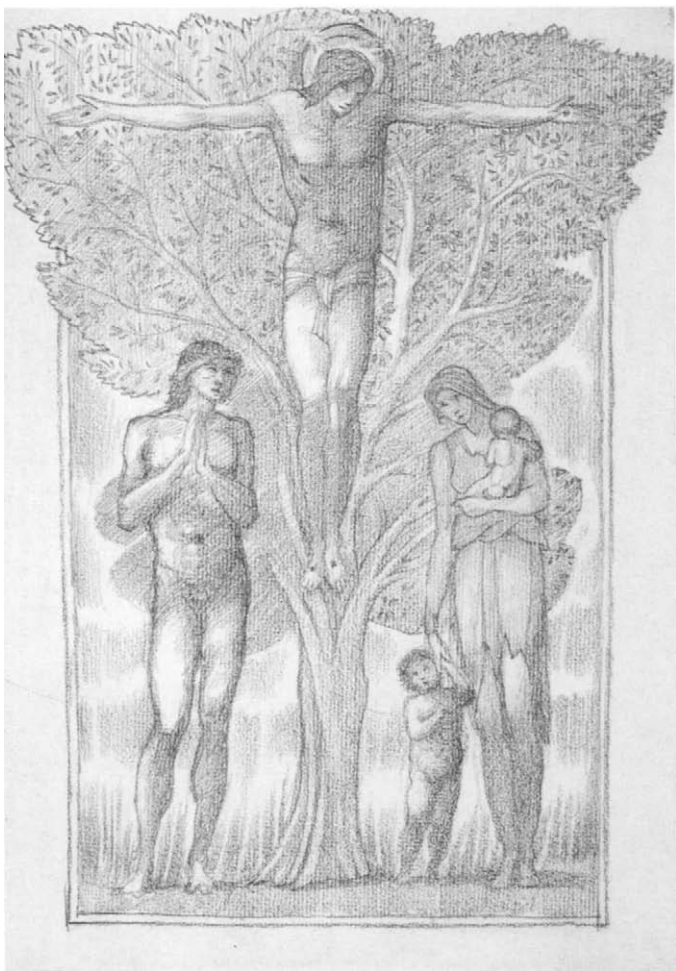
These four small windows, destined for an upstairs landing, neatly encapsulate the Quest for the Holy Grail, concentrating on the failures of Sir Launcelot (for his adultery with Guinevere) and Sir Gawaine (on account of his worldliness) and its achievement by the spiritually pure Sir Galahad. The same essential subjects would be treated in the series of Holy Grail tapestries (cat. nos. 145–151), for which these designs may be regarded as something of a trial run. The cartoons survive in the William Morris Gallery, Walthamstow, and derive from



139 (4)

studies in the “*Secret*” *Book of Designs*, begun in 1885 (cat. no. 140). Burne-Jones slightly reworked the composition of Sir Galahad and the Angel for one of the frontispieces to *The High History of the Holy Graal*, a two-volume edition by Sebastian Evans of the French medieval romance *Perceval le gallois*, published in 1898.⁴ The frontispiece to the second volume is a quite different depiction of the Grail Chapel, although the repeated title page carries a similar image of the simple, round-arched baldachin and chalice that is common to both the stained glass and the tapestry.

1. As they were for his own use, the designs do not appear in Burne-Jones’s account book with Morris & Company, but they are entered in the firm’s catalogue of designs under December 1886; see Sewter 1974–75, vol. 2, pp. 104–5. There seem originally to have been painted roundels below each panel, but these have been lost.



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2. *Memorials*, vol. 2, pp. 123–24. There are four Burne-Jones windows in Saint Margaret's Church, Rottingdean, which is immediately across the village green from the house (and is where Burne-Jones's ashes rest); the east window of 1893 was a gift to commemorate the wedding there in 1888 of his daughter, Margaret, to J. W. Mackail.

3. Sewter 1974–75, vol. 2, p. 26.

4. Burne-Jones met the scholar and artist Sebastian Evans (1830–1909) in 1885 and discovered in him a kindred spirit. He encouraged this translation of the Holy Grail legend, "all of which [Evans] had read aloud in the studio as he wrote it, to Edward's great delight" (*Memorials*, vol. 2, p. 332).

140.

The "Secret" Book of Designs

1885–98

Album of drawings: pencil and chalk, with watercolor, 14¾ x 11⅞ in. (37.4 x 30 cm)

Stamped on outer cover: EBJ 1885

PROVENANCE: Bequeathed by the artist, 1898

EXHIBITED: Arts Council 1975–76, no. 327

Trustees of the British Museum, London (1899–7–13)

BIRMINGHAM ONLY

This remarkable album of drawings, carefully inlaid and mounted, is a compilation of mostly decorative designs

dating from about 1885, when Burne-Jones may well have begun to gather together sketches for later use. It has acquired the appellation "Secret" only because it contains some of the artist's more fantastic flights of imagination, which he may have thought politic to keep separate from the bulk of his drawings and sketchbooks, usually made available to visitors in the "home" studio at The Grange. Soon after the album's bequest to the British Museum, the author of an article in the 1900 edition of the *Magazine of Art* marveled at such strange designs as the stem of naked female torsos, each within a leaf; the line of sea nymphs hovering between rolling waves; and "from the pages of the heathen mythology . . . a pencil sketch of a woman on a fiery car drawn by serpents."¹ Other pages are reproduced in Aymer Vallance's article, also of 1900, on the artist's decorative work. These include one of several appearances of the peacock motif (possibly for wall decoration) and a number of designs for jewelry.²

The album also includes more straightforward preparatory studies for specific executed works, ranging from the *Song of Solomon* (see cat. nos. 82, 83), perhaps relating to their translation into embroidery, to schematic designs for late stained glass, such as *The End of the World*, with its trumpeting angels and falling towers, which was modified for the 1896 Last Judgment window at Saint Philip's, Birmingham (now the cathedral).³ Of particular importance is a series of studies charting the evolution of designs for mosaics in the American Church in Rome, designed by the architect George Edmund Street (1824–1881), in whose office Morris had worked in the 1850s. "I want to do big things and vast spaces," Burne-Jones once confided to a friend;⁴ the opportunity was provided in 1881, with a commission from Street to decorate first the apse and then the nave and chancel arches. With the help of Morris and Rooke, the practical problems of designing in this difficult and unfamiliar medium were overcome, and the main panel, *The Heavenly Jerusalem*, executed by the Venezia Murano Glass and Mosaic Company, was unveiled on Christmas Day 1885.⁵

The project hung fire for several years but was revived, and an Annunciation—set in a bleak desert landscape—was designed for the chancel, followed by the Tree of Life above the apsidal arch. Work on the mosaics was begun in 1892, and they were unveiled together on November 18, 1894. By this date Burne-Jones traveled only in his imagination, and sadly he never saw these spectacular works in situ. Displayed here is a first design for the Tree of Life (fol. 414), which is certainly earlier than 1888, when finished gouaches of the final subjects were shown at the inaugural exhibition of the Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society.⁶ Burne-Jones had called it "[a] design I had set my heart on—of a great flowering tree growing all over the space; myriads of leaves to it, every leaf as big as a man's hand, and in the tree a very pale Christ."⁷ Adam and Eve are shown below, with their children, offering an additional identification with the Tree of Knowledge. Other commentators saw a further association with Igdrasil, the world tree of Scandinavian myth, which accorded with Ruskin's acknowledgment in his 1883 "Art

of England” lectures of “the command now possessed by Mr. Burne-Jones over the entire range both of Northern and Greek Mythology, [and] the tenderness at once, or largeness, of sympathy which have enabled him to harmonise these with the loveliest traditions of Christian legend.”⁸

1. See W. Roberts, “Our National Museums and Galleries: Recent Acquisitions—The British Museum: The Burne-Jones Drawings,” *Magazine of Art*, 1900, pp. 453–56, where all three drawings are reproduced.
2. Vallance 1900, *passim*.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 14, *illus.*
4. *Memorials*, vol. 2, p. 13.
5. Thorough accounts of the scheme are provided in Dorment 1978 and Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna 1986.
6. These can be seen among the decorative designs hung in the drawing room of The Grange, in a photograph taken about 1890 (reproduced in Dorment 1978, fig. 29). A very large watercolor of the final Tree of Life (71¼ x 95 in.) was purchased for the South Kensington Museum from the artist's first studio sale in 1898 and remains in the Victoria and Albert Museum (Arts Council 1975–76, no. 215).
7. Letter to Frances Horner, quoted in Horner 1933, p. 125.
8. Ruskin, *Works*, vol. 33 (1908), pp. 296–97. One identification with Igdrasil is to be found in De Lisle 1904, p. 147.

I41.

The Star of Bethlehem

1887–90

Watercolor and bodycolor, 101½ x 152 in. (257 x 386 cm)

Signed and dated: E. B. J. 1890

PROVENANCE: Commissioned by the Corporation of Birmingham, 1887

EXHIBITED: Birmingham collection 1891, no. 183; New Gallery, London, 1891, no. 63

Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery (1891P75)

BIRMINGHAM ONLY

I42.

The Adoration of the Magi

Designed 1888; woven 1894

Wool and silk tapestry on cotton warp, 101½ x 151¼ in. (258 x 384 cm);

executed by Morris & Company

Inscribed: This tapestry the work of William Morris—was designed by Sir E. Burne-Jones Bart and made at Merton Abbey in the year 1894—is given by a citizen of Manchester in loving memory of his mother

PROVENANCE: Presented by William Simpson, 1895

EXHIBITED: Inspired by Design: The Arts and Crafts Collection of the Manchester Metropolitan University, Manchester City Art Galleries, 1994, no. 22

The Manchester Metropolitan University, Faculty of Art and Design (MMU 10192)

In 1886 William Morris was asked by Exeter College, Oxford, to produce a tapestry for the college chapel. The request came from John Prideaux Lightfoot (1803–1887), who had been elected Rector of the college in 1854, when Morris and Burne-Jones were undergraduates. Thirty years later, he wished to have something designed by the now famous alumni, who had received Honorary Fellowships in 1883. That the subject should be an Adoration of the Magi seems to have been Lightfoot's idea, as Morris's letter of September 6, 1886, indicates: “I do not think you need go further to look for a subject, since the one you suggest seems a very good one from every point of view, and especially would suit the genius of tapestry completely; I feel sure that Burne Jones will agree with me in this.”¹ A few days later, having inspected the proposed site on the wall of George Gilbert Scott's chapel, Morris announced, “We should be very pleased to undertake the work and would do our best to make it as splendid & complete as possible. I have spoken to Mr. Burne-Jones on the matter, and he highly approves of the scheme, and will be glad to design the subject.”² The specific treatment of the biblical story of the three wise men derives from a medieval legend, the Kings of Cologne, in which Gaspar, King of Godolie, with Melchior, King of Tarsis, and Balthazar, King of Nubia, journey to Bethlehem, and afterward establish a church at Seville, in which all three are buried after their deaths. Their bodies are later removed to Cologne, and there a cathedral is built in their honor.

Burne-Jones had already designed several Adoration subjects for stained glass, but all on quite a small scale. He may already have begun to work out the composition, in rough sketches such as the three now in the Cincinnati Art Museum and the series of designs in a sketchbook in the Victoria and Albert Museum,³ before being given the welcome opportunity to work on the same subject as an independent painting on a large scale. Having succumbed to the persistence of the Royal Birmingham Society of Artists by agreeing to be its Honorary President in 1885 and then paying a weeklong visit to his native city in October of that year, Burne-Jones was approached by the Corporation of Birmingham in 1887 to paint a major work for the new municipal Museum and Art Gallery. In taking up a commission of £2,000, he was able to propose the same Adoration subject under the title *The Star of Bethlehem*, to be executed in watercolor.

The “Design for the tapestry for Exeter College Oxford,” listed under 1888 in Burne-Jones's account book with Morris & Company and for which he received £250, is presumably the watercolor (25½ x 38½ in.) formerly in the family collection.⁴ From this must have been made the working cartoon, photographically enlarged for use by the weavers, which survives in the Victoria and Albert Museum.⁵ It includes only the figures and the manger of wattle and thatch, without the wooded background and the proliferation of flowers which John Henry Dearle could never resist. In this state it emphasizes Morris's comment, in a letter of November 11, 1887, to Lightfoot, that “Mr. Burne Jones thought it better to have as much picture



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space as possible so as to get the figures larger, in which view I quite agree.”⁶

The first weaving was well advanced in September 1888, when Morris told his daughter Jenny that he had just been to Hampton Court “to have a good look at the tapestries as we [are] about beginning the figure of the Virgin in our big tapestry.”⁷ It was completed in February 1890 and exhibited in the firm’s Oxford Street showrooms over Easter, before being delivered to Oxford. Morris charged the college £525, a price that was hardly realistic but one that he adhered to for a second version, made for the writer Wilfrid Scawen Blunt. The present version, the third, woven in 1894, was made for the Manchester calico printer William Simpson, who presented it to the City of Manchester.⁸ The *Adoration* turned out to be the most popular of all the Merton Abbey tapestries, and seven more weavings followed, the last executed in 1907; there are examples at Eton College (1895), in the Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide (1901), in the State Hermitage, Saint Petersburg (1902), and at the Castle Museum, Norwich (1906).⁹

Although *The Star of Bethlehem* has the distinctively two-dimensional feel of a composition originating as a decorative design, Burne-Jones was able to use its immense size to increase the areas of space between and behind the figures, so as to give a greater sense of depth and atmosphere. There is also more richness of detail than could be entertained in the tapestry, especially in the elaborate costume given to the younger of the three

kings: Melchior’s surcoat has silver disks with emblematic figures of lions, centaurs, sphinxes, and birds, and in addition to a frieze of exotic dancing angels, the robe worn by Balthazar carries another variation on the artist’s delightfully round type of ancient ship; the inscriptions were studied from genuine Kufic examples. In contrast, the older Gaspar wears a plain robe, only just revealing a glimpse beneath of a border decorated with the image of Saint George and the Dragon. The balancing figure of Joseph allows a focus just offset from the center of the picture, a clever device which adds to the informality of the holy group, and to the poignancy of the moment, as described in the *New Gallery Notes*, when “the Child Jesus turns towards His Mother, but looks around at the figures, the childish fear being overcome by the divine nature.”¹⁰ The remodeling of the Christ Child is one of the major changes to the original design, Burne-Jones having apparently obtained an infant model, of whom he made a lively study in chalk.¹¹ He also made a series of individual studies of each of the figures, in colored chalks on brown paper, heightened with gold; seven of these are known, all dated 1887.¹²

The picture, on the largest obtainable sheets of paper mounted on canvas, had to be painted in the garden studio at The Grange, Burne-Jones using a ladder to reach the topmost area: “And a tiring thing it is, physically, to do,” he wrote, “up my steps and down, and from right to left. I have journeyed as many miles already as ever the kings travelled.”¹³ Finished in 1890, it was sent to the New Gallery in the spring of 1891, then



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to Birmingham, where it formed the centerpiece of a major loan exhibition of Pre-Raphaelite painting, which opened October 2 with an address by William Morris. F. G. Stephens and Holman Hunt were in the audience, but Burne-Jones himself seems not to have made the trip.¹⁴ Viewers at both exhibitions were deeply impressed by this new icon of British religious art, not only for its sumptuous color and unusual gravitas, but also for its exceptionally spiritual quality. The crit-

ic of the *Art Journal* was especially impressed by the angel—"this strange, radiant figure, resembling a statue from Chartres or Rheims, into which the glow of life [has] been infused"—and recognized Burne-Jones's "own peculiar vein of mysticism."¹⁵ It is certainly the finest religious painting by an artist whose faith was of a personal, idiosyncratic kind. As Georgiana Burne-Jones later recalled: "To a young girl who, with the boldness of inexperience, asked him as she watched



Edward Burne-Jones, Preliminary sketch for *The Star of Bethlehem*, ca. 1887. Pencil, 8 x 12 3/4 in. (20.2 x 32.3 cm). Cincinnati Art Museum



Edward Burne-Jones at work on *The Star of Bethlehem*, ca. 1889



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him painting 'The Star of Bethlehem', whether he believed in it, he answered: 'It is too beautiful not to be true.'¹⁶

1. Morris, *Letters*, vol. 2b, 1885–1888 (1987), p. 572.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 574.
3. Sketches in black chalk, each 8 x 13 in. (20.3 x 32.3 cm), Cincinnati Art Museum (1910.2–4); sketchbook, Victoria and Albert Museum, E.9–1955 (Victoria and Albert Museum 1996, no. M.127).
4. Sotheby's, November 3, 1993, lot 219.
5. Victoria and Albert Museum, E.5012–1919 (Victoria and Albert Museum 1996, no. M.128).
6. Morris, *Letters*, vol. 2b, 1885–1888 (1987), p. 711.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 813.
8. "Mr. William Simpson has offered to present to Manchester a replica of the magnificent tapestry 'The Adoration of the Magi'" (*Magazine of Art*, November 1895, p. 39). Simpson was later Deputy Chairman of the School of Art Committee.
9. For further details of the versions, see Birmingham Museums and Art

Gallery 1981, p. 107, and Victoria and Albert Museum 1996, p. 293.

10. *New Gallery Notes*, 1891, p. 10.
11. Sold at Sotheby's, September 24, 1987, lot 528.
12. One of these, of *Balthazar* (13½ x 6½ in. [34.8 x 16.3 cm]), is in the Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery (33'16); the other six (averaging 13¾ x 7 in. [35 x 18 cm]) were sold at Sotheby's, November 3, 1993, lot 220.
13. *Memorials*, vol. 2, p. 209.
14. See *Academy*, October 10, 1891, p. 317.
15. *Art Journal*, June 1891, p. 185. An early encomium of praise for the picture appeared in the Ruskinian magazine *World-Literature* for March 1892, in which Mrs. Alice Hyde Oxenham noted enthusiastically how "chance led my footsteps to Birmingham, and there, of all places—in grimy, smoky, manufacturing Birmingham—I found 'The Star of Bethlehem,' by Mr. Burne Jones. Here, and here alone, was what I sought. Colour, as of opals and sapphires and humming-bird's wings (the prevailing tone a bluish green, but shot through with indescribably lovely shades of rose and crimson and faint purples); composition, perfect in restful harmony; and, above all, conception, without which all else is but as Dead Sea fruit."
16. *Memorials*, vol. 2, p. 209.



I44

I43.

Angeli Laudantes

Woven 1894

Wool, silk, and mohair tapestry on cotton warp, 93½ x 79½ in. (237.5 x 202 cm); woven at the Merton Abbey Works of Morris & Company

Inscribed: Angeli laudantes

PROVENANCE: Purchased from Morris & Company, 1898

EXHIBITED: Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery 1981, no. T16;

Victoria and Albert Museum 1996, no. M.125a

Victoria and Albert Museum, London (T153-1894)

I44.

Angeli Ministrantes

Woven 1894

Wool, silk, and mohair tapestry on cotton warp, 95½ x 78¼ in. (241.5 x 200 cm); woven at the Merton Abbey Works of Morris & Company

Inscribed: Angeli ministrantes



Edward Burne-Jones. Cartoon for *Angeli Ministrantes*, 1878. Colored chalks, 83½ x 59¼ in. (212.3 x 150.5 cm). Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge

PROVENANCE: Edwin Waterhouse; Charles Handley-Read; purchased 1993

EXHIBITED: Victoria and Albert Museum 1996, no. M.125b

Victoria and Albert Museum, London (T.459-1993). Purchased with assistance from the National Art Collections Fund and the National Heritage Memorial Fund

This magnificent pair of tapestries, only recently reunited at the Victoria and Albert Museum, derives from stained-glass designs made by Burne-Jones for twin lancet windows in the choir of Salisbury Cathedral. His account book with Morris & Company lists, between March and August 1878, “4 colossal and sublime figures of Angels £20 ea[ch] £80.”¹ They are certainly the most impressive of Burne-Jones’s mature angel figures, displaying, in the words of Malcolm Bell, the artist’s first chronicler, “his admirable use of wings and drapery alone to secure a rich decorative effect.”² Bell describes the second pair of more earthbound ministering angels as “pausing in the path of mercy to rest awhile their weary sandal-shod feet, and bearing the palmer’s cloak marked with the cockle-shell of St. Jago [Saint James or Santiago of Compostella], the pilgrim’s staff and bottle and bag of meal, but so elaborate is the modelling of the garments, so skilful the arrangement of the wings, that the whole heavenly host could not produce a more complete effect of well-filled space, without confusion, in which each line and shadow is full of interest and importance.”³

Full-size cartoons for the tapestries are preserved in the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge, with later coloring added in chalks, in a manner similar to the enhancement of the *Last Judgment* cartoons (cat. no. 71).⁴ These have been further amended, presumably from photographs, for translation into tapestry: an outer set of wings to each angel has been eliminated to make room for the kind of stylized millefleur backgrounds beloved of John Henry Dearle, who also designed the orange and pomegranate borders.

The tapestries were executed in 1894 by John Martin, William Haines, and William Elliman, senior weavers at Merton Abbey. Several later versions were made, including a pair woven in 1905 as a Boer War memorial for Eton College Chapel; in these, the figures of angels are placed over depictions of heraldic shields hung from trees, echoing the verdure panels from the Holy Grail series (cat. no. 151).⁵

1. Sewter 1974–75, vol. 2, p. 167.

2. Bell 1892 (1898), p. 65.

3. Ibid.

4. Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge (699.1–2); Victoria and Albert Museum (1996, no. M.124a,b).

5. See Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery 1981, p. 108, and Victoria and Albert Museum 1996, p. 290.

The Holy Grail Tapestries

Designed 1890–91; first woven 1891–95 by Morris & Company

In December 1888 Morris visited Stanmore Hall, Middlesex, to discuss the interior decoration of the house as a commission from William Knox D’Arcy, a wealthy Australian mining and oil magnate. The focus was to be the dining room, for which Morris and Burne-Jones devised a sequence of large-scale tapestries, illustrating the Quest for the Holy Grail. This part of the Arthurian legend had recently been translated into a set of small panels of stained glass (cat. no. 139), and seemed to Morris not only “the most beautiful and complete episode in the legends,” but also “in itself a series of pictures.”¹ The opportunity was not wasted, the two friends producing one of the great masterpieces of late Victorian decorative art, in a collaboration equaled only by the Kelmscott Press *Chaucer* (cat. no. 154); a companion edition of Malory’s *Morte d’Arthur* was mooted, but never begun.

Five major subjects were designed, to hang beneath the cornice of the room, with decorative verdure tapestries at dado level below, showing deer grazing among trees hung with shields of the Knights of the Round Table and carrying texts descriptive of the scenes above (see cat. no. 151). To these was added a small upright panel of a ship, symbolic of the travel undertaken on the quest. Burne-Jones had begun designs by the end of 1890,² and a surviving sketchbook mostly used in about 1890–91 (Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery; 1952P6) reveals his having undertaken much research into Byzantine and early medieval decorative art. Just as there is no strict adherence to Malory’s fifteenth-century text, however, Burne-Jones fixes no specific period in his treatment of costume and detail, using much of his own invention to create an appropriately timeless atmosphere.

In addition to a predictable number of fine individual figure studies, finished designs survive for each scene, but more practical working cartoons were also made for the weavers. The account of the work compiled for D’Arcy in 1895 by A. B. Bence-Jones records that from Burne-Jones’s scale designs “Mr J. H. Dearle made reduced drawings with colours, and these . . . were submitted to the artist for approval and if necessary, for alteration. . . . The original drawing was then photographed (by Messrs Walker and Boutall) to the full size, mounted on stretchers and returned to Mr Burne-Jones. . . . When returned . . . the foreground and background details were put in by Mr J. H. Dearle from his own drawings, the flowers and accessories throughout [being] added at this stage.”³ A further full-size tracing was then placed against the warp on the loom, which the weavers

followed, with the artist's original drawings to hand for reference. Burne-Jones received £1,000 for his designs, out of the substantial sum of £3,500 which D'Arcy paid for the tapestries.

Weaving of the set, using all three looms at Merton Abbey, took until 1895, *The Attainment* being completed in time for inclusion in the Arts and Crafts Exhibition at the New Gallery in 1893. Three of the subjects (*The Arming and Departure of the Knights*, *The Failure of Sir Gawaine*, and *The Attainment*) were immediately repeated, in 1895–96, for Laurence Hodson of Compton Hall, Wolverhampton. Soon afterward, in 1898–99, a set of the five narrative panels, together with one verdure, was made for George McCulloch, D'Arcy's business partner, and hung in his house at 184 Queen's Gate, London. These achieved great celebrity on being shown at the 1900 Paris Exposition Universelle (in a British pavilion designed by Sir Edwin Lutyens and modeled on McCulloch's country house, The Hall, at Bradford-upon-Avon) and later at the British Empire Exhibition of 1924–25.⁴ *The Ship* and a verdure panel were woven for Mrs. Mary Middlemore in 1900, and one other verdure is known to have been executed. Final versions of *The Summons* and *The Attainment* were made by Morris & Company between 1927 and 1932, for Henry Beecham of Lympne Castle, Kent.⁵

1. A. B. Bence-Jones, "The Holy Grail Tapestries," 1895, manuscript, National Art Library, Victoria and Albert Museum, London, quoted in Victoria and Albert Museum 1996, p. 294.
2. Burne-Jones, letter to Lady Leighton, December 23, 1890; quoted in Victoria and Albert Museum 1996, p. 294.
3. Bence-Jones, "Holy Grail Tapestries."
4. The Stanmore Hall series was dispersed after the First World War, the narrative subjects passing into the collection of the Duke of Westminster; three of these—*The Arming and Departure of the Knights*, *The Failure of Sir Gawaine*, and *The Attainment*—were sold at Sotheby's in April 1978

- (see Victoria and Albert Museum 1996, nos. M.130,131). McCulloch's set was sold in 1927, and the four remaining panels (apart from *The Summons*) were sold, and now belong to Lord Lloyd-Webber Foundation.
5. The Beecham version of *The Attainment* was sold at Sotheby's on March 20, 1987, while *The Summons* remains in the collection of the Stadtmuseum, Munich.

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The Knights of the Round Table Summoned to the Quest by a Strange Damsel (The Summons)

Woven 1898–99

Wool and silk tapestry on cotton warp, 96½ x 131½ in. (245 x 535 cm); executed by Morris & Company

Inscribed: CCCCLIII HIEMIBUS PERACTIS POST NATVM DMN NOSTRYMIC OPORTET HANC SEDE COMPLERI (Four hundred winters and four and fifty accomplished after the passion of our Lord Jesus Christ ought this siege to be fulfilled)

PROVENANCE: George McCulloch; Mrs. Coutts Mitchie; Lord Lee of Fareham; purchased at Sotheby's Belgravia, September 24, 1980, lot 326

EXHIBITED: Exposition Universelle, Paris, 1900; Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery 1981, no. T10

Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery. Presented by the Trustees of Birmingham City Museums and Art Gallery Appeal Fund, with assistance from Government grant-in-aid administered by the Victoria and Albert Museum, the National Heritage Memorial Fund, the National Art Collections Fund, and the W. A. Cadbury Charitable Trust (1980M60)

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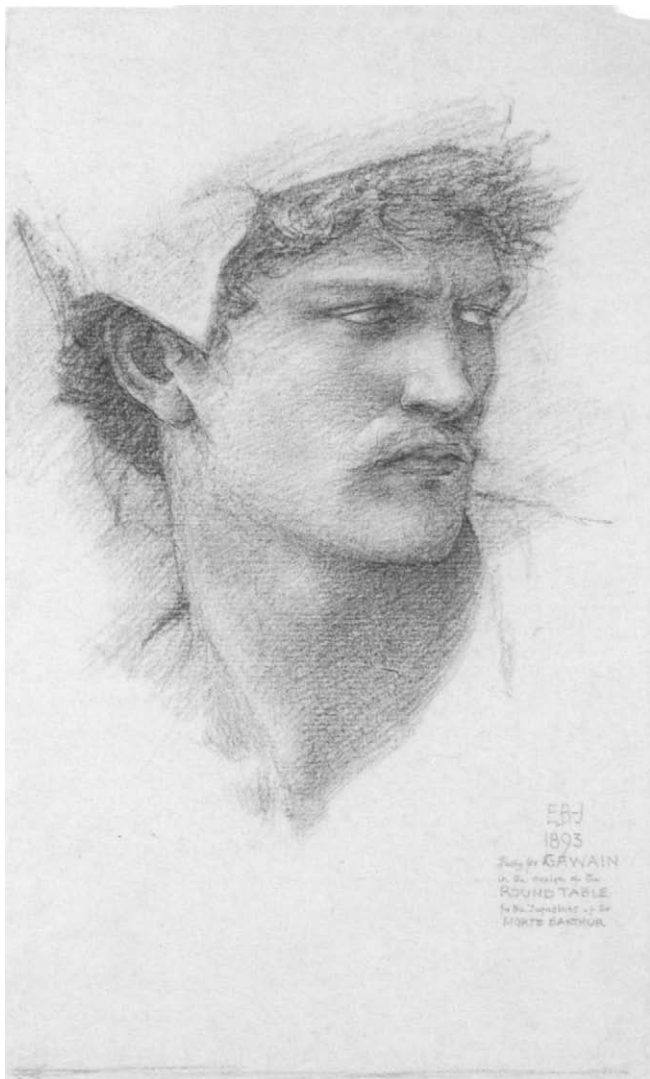
The Summons: Study for the head of Gawaine

1893

Pencil, 15 x 9 in. (38.1 x 22.8 cm)

Signed, dated, and inscribed: E B-J 1893 study for GAWAIN in the design of the ROUND TABLE for the Tapestries of the MORTE DARTHUR





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PROVENANCE: William Hesketh Lever, 1st Viscount Leverhulme; Lady Lever Art Gallery, Port Sunlight; Christie's, June 6, 1958

EXHIBITED: Burlington Fine Arts Club 1899, no. 110; Lady Lever Art Gallery 1948, no. 50

The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Robert Lehman Collection 1975 (1975.1.878)

The accompanying verdure bore the inscription "How king arthur sat in his hall at high tide of pentecost and how the whole round table was there assembled when there entered to them a damsel and called upon the knights to take upon them the quest of the sangreal whereof was great stir and wonder amongst them of the Round Table both the king and his knights." Presumably composed by Morris, this is in the style of the chapter headings of William Caxton's 1485 edition of Malory's *Morte d'Arthur*, and explains a scene that conflates the beginning of book 13 with the later miraculous appearance of the inscription on the Siege Perilous (from the old French word for a chair), heralding the coming of the knight who will succeed in the quest. In Burne-Jones's own words, "suddenly writing comes on the empty chair, the Siege Perilous set by

Arthur, where no man can sit but the one who can achieve the adventure. Launcelot is opposite the chair, and points to himself as if asking if he is to sit there. Gawaine and Lamorak and Percival and Bors are all there."¹ This device serves to introduce Sir Galahad, whose Christian chivalric virtues are underscored by the doves, symbolizing the Holy Ghost, placed above the chair. It is he who will salve the conscience of King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table, by achieving the spiritual quest for the Holy Grail, the vessel believed to have been used by Christ at the Last Supper and later by Joseph of Arimathea to catch the blood issuing from the side of the Crucified Christ on the cross. Galahad's subsequent arrival inspires a collective vision of the Grail, which marks the beginning of the quest.

The other knights, in addition to those cited by Burne-Jones, are Sir Ector (or Hector) de Marys and Sir Kay. Together, the figures form a friezelike composition often used by the artist and particularly reminiscent of *The Feast of Peleus* (cat. no. 51), in which there is a similar interruption by an unexpected visitor. The round-backed seats may have been inspired by early Renaissance painting, and were themselves copied by the architect M. H. Baillie Scott as furnishings for his interiors of 1897–98 at Darmstadt for Ernst Ludwig, Grand Duke of Hesse, appropriately the owner of Burne-Jones's later oil of Saint George (cat. no. 86).² A simpler version, with a solid back and painted panels (William Morris Gallery, Walthamstow), was made as early as 1856, as part of the furniture for the rooms Morris and Burne-Jones shared in Red Lion Square.³

Two preparatory designs, of roughly the same size, are known (19³/₄ x 39³/₈ in.). One, now at Birmingham, must be an early conception, as the figures are studied from the nude, and the Siege Perilous is placed farther to the left, beyond a second pillar eliminated from the final composition.⁴ The other, more finished,⁵ would conform with Morris's description of the original studies as being "not above 15 inches high. The figures are grouped and drawn from carefully prepared studies: for the most part there is but little minuteness of detail and they are only slightly tinted."⁶ What appears to be a photographic copy of this design can be seen on the wall next to the loom, in a photograph of *The Summons* made during weaving at Merton Abbey.⁷ Parts of the larger photographic enlargements, including the head of Sir Launcelot and the figures of Sir Palomedes and Sir Bors, are in the William Morris Gallery, Walthamstow.⁸ The fine drawing for the head of Gawaine (seated nearest to the Damsel) is one of several portraitlike studies for the main figures; a similar drawing of Lamorak remains in the collection of the Lady Lever Art Gallery, Port Sunlight.

1. Letter of 1890 to Helen Gaskell, quoted in *Memorials*, vol. 2, p. 208.

2. See James D. Kornwolf, *M. H. Baillie Scott and the Arts and Crafts Movement* (Baltimore and London, 1972), pp. 162–68; one of the chairs was illustrated in *Studio* 15 (July 1898), p. 92. A friendly carpenter made up actual examples of the round-backed chairs for Burne-Jones to use as models, which the artist's granddaughter later recalled in use in the summer house at North End House, Rottingdean: "The seats were very high off the ground with no depth from back to front, so that any knight who used them would have sat like a child with his feet dangling in the

air, if indeed he managed to keep himself balanced on the exiguous chair at all. . . . If that is how Arthur's court was furnished it is quite enough to explain the eagerness of the knights to leave their seats and follow the quest of the Holy Grail and one can only conclude that the Siege Perilous was even more uncomfortable and ill-adapted to the human frame than the seats of the other knights" (Thirkell 1931, pp. 80–81).

3. Victoria and Albert Museum 1996, no. J.4; see Peter Cormack, discussion of William Morris's "Weaving Chair," *Journal of the Edward Barnsley Educational Trust*, no. 3 (March 1996).
4. Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery (1994P22); previously sold at Christie's, December 15, 1987, lot 66, illus.
5. Sotheby's Belgravia, November 16, 1976, lot 252, illus.
6. Aymer Vallance, "The Revival of Tapestry-Weaving: An Interview with William Morris," *Studio* 3 (1894).
7. Reproduced in Morris, *Letters*, vol. 4, 1893–1896 (1996), p. 90.
8. See Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery 1981, p. 108, no. T10A, and Whitworth Art Gallery 1984, p. 190, no. 150.

147.

The Arming and Departure of the Knights of the Round Table on the Quest of the Holy Grail

Woven 1895–96

Wool and silk tapestry on cotton warp, 96 x 142½ in. (244 x 362 cm); executed by Morris & Company

PROVENANCE: Laurence Hodson; sold Christie's, 1906, where bought by Morris & Company; purchased by public subscription, 1907

EXHIBITED: Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery 1981, no. T11

Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery (1907 M129)



Morris & Company. The dining room at Stanmore Hall, Stanmore, Middlesex, showing the Holy Grail tapestry, *The Arming and Departure of the Knights*, 1890–94





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The inscription on the verdure reads: "How after that the damsel had bidden the knights of the round table to seek the sangrael they departed on the quest whatever might befall but of those that departed these are the chiefest, sir gawaine, sir lancelot of the lake, sir hector de marys, sir bors de gamys, sir perceval and sir galahad." Or, as Burne-Jones put it: "The knights go forth, and it is good-bye all round."¹ In Malory's text the leave-taking is an occasion for "weeping and great sorrow," as King Arthur bewails that his "true fellowship shall never meet here more again." Here it is a more cheerful departure, the knights shown receiving their shields and armor from the ladies of Camelot. On the left, Launcelot takes his armament from Guinevere, a reminder of his adultery with the Queen, which is the cause of his subsequent failure on the quest. The balancing figure on the right is Gawaine, with an eagle on his shield.

This subject is one of Burne-Jones's most successful groups of large-scale figures, its basically symmetrical composition dictated by the decision that the original tapestry would hang over one corner of the dining room at Stanmore Hall. The shimmering complementary colors of red, green, and gold are enhanced by Morris's decision to use silk threads in the weaving, which were described in Burne-Jones's account as "essential to certain effects where bright colours were wanted, as in the sheen of metal and for the armours; and in the draperies where the damask effect is produced by silk."²

A first design for the subject, known as *The Departure of the Knights*, must date from 1890, and shows the mounted knights, on the point of departure from an outdoor camp, turning to acknowledge a group of figures which includes both King Arthur and Queen Guinevere; on the right Galahad rides off, preceded by a vision of the Holy Grail.³ The body of knights, with a mass of swirling banners filling the upper ground, is close in feel both to *Flodden Field* (cat. no. 132) and to the two battle scenes initially conceived to flank the central part of *Arthur in Avalon*, as depicted in the large modello in watercolor now at the Kōriyama Museum of Art, Japan. Burne-Jones must soon have recognized the necessity of concentrating on more focused combinations of figures to fill the picture plane, and there are two designs known for the eventual composition of *The Arming and Departure of the Knights*, which show a refinement of the design toward its finished state.⁴ Among a number of individual figure studies is one for the lady holding Launcelot's helmet (Edmonton Art Gallery, Canada).⁵

1. *Memorials*, vol. 2, p. 208.

2. A. B. Burne-Jones, "The Holy Grail Tapestries," 1895, manuscript, National Art Library, Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

3. In pastel, 29½ x 54 in. (75 x 137.5 cm); Arts Council 1975-76, no. 229.

4. One in colored chalks, 20 x 28 in. (51 x 71 cm), sold at Christie's, July 4, 1967, lot 62; the second in watercolor, bodycolor, and chalks, signed and dated 1891, is at Magdalen College, Oxford.

5. Art Gallery of Ontario 1993-94, no. A:24.

The Failure of Sir Gawaine: Sir Gawaine and Sir Uwaine at the Ruined Chapel

Woven 1895–96

Wool and silk tapestry on cotton warp, 95½ x 116½ in. (243 x 296 cm);
executed by Morris & Company

PROVENANCE: Laurence Hodson; sold Christie's, 1906, where bought by
Morris & Company; purchased by public subscription, 1907

EXHIBITED: Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery 1981, no. T12

Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery (1907M130)

The verdure inscription reads: "How sir gawaine and sir uwaine went their ways to seek the sangreal but might no wise attain to the sight of it but were brought to shame because of the evil life they led aforetime." Burne-Jones describes the knights as "eaten up by the world—handsome gentlemen set on this world's glory."¹ The heraldic device on the second figure's shield does indeed identify him as Uwaine, although in Malory's text Gawaine had ridden "from Whitsuntide till Michaelmas" without great adventure, before falling in with Ector de Maris. After another eight days, these two arrive at a deserted chapel, where a disembodied voice proclaims: "Knights full of evil faith and of poor belief, these two things have failed you, and therefore ye may not come to the adventures of the Sangreal." Burne-Jones converts this episode into the vision of an angel who bars the door of the chapel, protected by the artist's favorite briar roses; a light from within suggests the presence of the Holy Grail, which the knights are unable to attain. The design in colored chalks is in a private collection, and highly finished pencil studies are known for both mounted figures.²

For a man with a great fondness for animals, there are very few depictions in Burne-Jones's major works. Those seen here are his most ambitious treatments of the horse, which he described to his studio assistant T. M. Rooke as "a fine ornament in a picture—when a knight and his horse look like one animal. I won't seek horses to do, but I won't mind them when they come in. I can't do them anything like as well as some chaps, but I'll get through them somehow."³

The second of what the artist called "the foiling of the knights," and the fourth panel in the series, depicts the Failure of Sir Launcelot: "Of the quest of lancelet of the lake and how he rode the world round and came to a chapel wherein was the sangreal but because of his sins he might not enter but fell asleep before the holy things and was put to shame in unseemly wise." In this darker, more somber image a similar angel appears at the doorway to a chapel, in which again the light emitted through the door implies the presence of the holy vessel; Launcelot is asleep, a reference to the dream in which, in Malory's text, he has a vision of the Grail, while at the same time he recognizes his unworthiness. The subject recalls Rossetti's mural of 1857 for the Oxford Union Society, which has essentially the same composition, in which Burne-Jones acted as the model for the sleeping Launcelot. Studies are to be found in the *"Secret" Book of Designs* (cat. no. 140).⁴ The

design in colored chalks is in the same private collection as that for *The Failure of Sir Gawaine*; a large but looser sketch in chalks and gray wash may relate to the later version of the subject in oils, painted in 1895–96 (see cat. no. 162).

1. *Memorials*, vol. 2, p. 208.

2. The study of Sir Gawaine is reproduced in Wood 1907, pl. 25, and that for Sir Uwaine, signed and dated 1893, was sold at Christie's, November 8, 1996, lot 43.

3. Lago 1981, p. 81 (entry for January 8, 1896). A plaster model of a horse, its head tilted just as in this composition, is to be seen beneath the table in a photograph of the home studio at The Grange reproduced in Cartwright 1894, p. 31.

4. British Museum, London (1899-7-13-461, 463, 464).



149.

The Ship

Woven 1900

Wool and silk tapestry on cotton warp, 94 $\frac{7}{8}$ x 51 $\frac{1}{8}$ in. (241 x 130 cm); executed by Morris & Company

PROVENANCE: Mrs. J. T. (later Lady) Middlemore; presented by Miss Evangeline Middlemore, 1947

EXHIBITED: Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery 1981, no. T13

Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery (1947M52)

And then comes the ship—which is as much to say that the scene has shifted, and we have passed from out of Britain and are in the land of Sarras, the land of the soul, that is.”¹ In Malory’s account the knights Bors, Perceval, and Galahad make the journey on a ship bearing on its stern the warning: “Thou man which shalt enter into this ship, beware that thou be in steadfast belief.”

There was a practical requirement for this smaller piece—to produce a vertical hanging for a corner of the dining room at Stanmore Hall—but Burne-Jones clearly reveled in the much-loved motif; the same type of jaunty, rounded vessel appears in the Viking Ship panel of stained glass designed in 1883 (see illus. on p. 289), as well as in the late oil painting *The Sirens* (cat. no. 157). Studies of similar ships from medieval manuscripts can be found in the *Holy Grail* sketchbook (Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery), as well as variations on the theme in the “Secret” *Book of Designs* (cat. no. 140). For use in the studio, he even had someone (presumably W. A. S. Benson) make a three-masted model ship in wood, with sails of sheet metal.²

1. *Memorials*, vol. 2, p. 209.

2. Illustrated in Burne-Jones 1900, p. 162.

150.

The Attainment: The Vision of the Holy Grail to Sir Galahad, Sir Bors, and Sir Percival

Woven 1895–96

Wool and silk tapestry, 96 $\frac{1}{2}$ x 273 in. (245 x 693 cm); executed by Morris & Company

PROVENANCE: Laurence Hodson; sold Christie’s, 1906, where bought by Morris & Company; purchased by public subscription, 1907

EXHIBITED: Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery 1981, no. T14

Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery (1907M131)

The culminating scene of the Holy Grail series originally occupied the entire back wall in the dining room at Stanmore Hall, where built-in serving tables precluded there being an accompanying verdure; the bottom right corner of the tapestry also had to be truncated to allow for a door.¹ In Burne-Jones’s description: “And of all the hundred and fifty that went on the Quest, three only are chosen and may set foot on that shore, Bors, Percival, and Galahad. Of these Bors and Percival may see the Grail afar off—three big angels bar their way, and one holds the spear that bleeds; that is the spear that entered Christ’s side, and it bleeds always. You know by its appearing that the Graal [*sic*] is near. And then comes Galahad who alone may see it—and to see it is death, for it is seeing the face of God.”² Although there are some discrepancies—the vision takes place within the court of King Pelles, and there are four angels—Burne-Jones generally keeps to the spirit of Malory. Galahad is surrounded by lilies, symbolizing purity, while within the Chapel the Holy Ghost, in the form of a rushing wind, deposits drops of blood into the Grail.

1. A photograph of the tapestry in situ is reproduced in Parry 1983, p. 116; the original *Attainment*, along with *The Arming and Departure of the Knights* also from the Stanmore Hall set, is reproduced in Victoria and Albert Museum 1996, no. M.130.

2. *Memorials*, vol. 2, p. 209.





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John Henry Dearle (1859–1932), after Burne-Jones
151.

Verdure with Deer and Shields

Woven 1900

Wool and silk tapestry on cotton warp, 61½ x 125¾ in. (156 x 318 cm);
executed by Morris & Company

Inscribed: *These are the arms of certain knights of the round table bidden to seek the sangreal who departed on the quest whatever might befall but of those that thus departed these are the chiefest sir gawaine of orkney, sir lancelet, sir hector de marys, sir bors, sir perceval, and sir galahad*

PROVENANCE: Mrs. J. T. (later Lady) Middlemore; presented by Miss Evangeline Middlemore, 1947

EXHIBITED: Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery 1981, no. T15

Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery (1947M53)

William Morris intended that the lower range of tapestries at Stanmore Hall should be “filled with decorative figures and scrolls with writing having relation to the pictures above; this will add very much to the general richness of effect without fatiguing the eye.”¹ Burne-Jones went further in designing a series of verdures—echoing Morris’s boyhood memories of “a room hung with greenery”—with deer and forest trees from which would hang shields bearing the arms of the Knights of the Round Table. These were not genuine coats of arms but were culled by Morris from two sixteenth-century French publications, which he was able to consult in the British Museum.² Writing to Lady Leighton in the winter of 1890–91, Burne-Jones expressed his debt to Morris—“who I think knows everything in the world”—but had to admit some disappointment at the result of his researches: apart from King Arthur’s shield, with crowns of gold on an azure background,

“mostly the noble knights have rather commonplace arms, and the unknown ones have beautiful ones, which is like the way of this worrying world. Galahad, for whom I should have liked to violate heraldry, giving him a cup of gold on a silver ground, has to bear a red cross only and it is so dull for him.”³ Designs for the coats of arms, including those for Tristram, Gawaine, and Lancelot, appear in the “Secret” *Book of Designs* (cat. no. 140), together with a long list of “Arms of the Round Table”; there follows the first idea of shields hung on stunted trees.⁴

The fate of the Stanmore verdures remains unknown. The present version, made in 1900, is an adaptation by John Henry Dearle of the first verdure, which fitted beneath *The Summons*. As identified by Emmeline Leary, the arms are “two unidentified shields on the lower branches of the tree to the left, the first shield immediately below the inscription is also unidentified; then Sir Gawaine, Sir Arain Dupin, Sir Lancelot, Sir Brollain, Sir Perceval, Sir Jambourg du Chastel, next unidentified, Sir Bors, next unidentified, Sir Galahad, Sir Tristram de Lyonesse, Sir Lyonnet de Gannes, next unidentified, and below this Sir Wolf Ganesmor le noir, and on the ground Sir Uwayne and Le roy Lyon.”⁵ Certain differences between Morris’s sources and their appearance in the tapestry were perhaps an attempt to avoid problematic colors and juxtapositions.

1. A. B. Bence-Jones, “The Holy Grail Tapestries,” 1895, manuscript, National Art Library, Victoria and Albert Museum, London; quoted in Leary 1985.

2. *Gyron le Courtois, avec la devise des armes des Chevaliers de la table ronde* (Paris, 1520) and an undated pamphlet, *La Devise des armes des Chevaliers de la table ronde qui estoient du temps du tres renome et vertueux Artus roy de la Grant Bretanique avec la description de leurs armoiries*; see Parry 1983, p. 117.

3. *Memorials*, vol. 2, p. 211.

4. British Museum, London (1899-7-13-483-495).

5. Leary 1985.

The Kelmscott Press

The last practical passion of Morris's life, and his final collaboration with Burne-Jones, was an extension of their mutual love for the book beautiful, which had nearly borne fruit in an illustrated edition of *The Earthly Paradise*, and which had given rise in the 1870s to a group of exquisite handwritten and illuminated manuscripts (cat. nos. 59, 66). A serious collector of early printed books, Morris was inspired by his printer friend Emery Walker (1851–1933) in the winter of 1889–90 to instigate thorough research into handmade paper and inks and the design of typefaces. In January 1891 he installed an Albion handpress at 16 Upper Mall, Hammersmith, a few doors from his London house (named after Kelmscott Manor), and his “little typographical adventure” with the Kelmscott Press had begun.

Just as in the formation of Morris, Marshall, Faulkner & Co., this was a conscious piece of Gothic Revival, Morris basing the type on early Renaissance models and aiming chiefly to publish editions of famous and lesser-known medieval texts. An assistant later wrote that William Caxton (ca. 1422–1491), the first English printer, “would have been comfortably at home with the Press as a whole,”¹ but in contrast to the 1860s, this deliberate archaism could now form a legitimate part of the ethic of handicraft central to the Arts and Crafts movement.

Ornament was to be an integral feature of Kelmscott Press books, and all fifty-three published works bear at least some form of decorated initials or borders, all designed by Morris. From the first he had intended that many of the books should include wood-block illustrations: “A book ornamented with pictures that are suitable for that book, and that book only,” he declared in 1893, “may become a work of art second to none, save a fine binding duly ornamented, or a fine piece of literature.”² Only seventeen ever did, however. Charles Fairfax Murray, Walter Crane, and Arthur Gaskin were commissioned for one volume each, but inevitably it was Burne-Jones (still involved in designing stained glass for Morris & Company, as well as tapestries) who was inveigled into providing the bulk of the designs—106 in all, 87 of them for the edition of *Chaucer*. It speaks much of his pleasure in what he regarded as relaxing work in decorative design, quite apart from his affection for his old friend, that Burne-Jones was willing to undertake such a considerable task; his reward was to produce one great masterpiece as well as a number of equally successful works.

The last volume, prepared by the secretary to the Press, Sydney Cockerell, and published in 1898, included a preface by Morris, dated November 11, 1895, which ended: “It was only natural that I, a decorator by profession, should attempt

to ornament my books suitably: about this matter, I will only say that I have always tried to keep in mind the necessity for making my decoration a part of the page of type. I may add that in designing the magnificent and inimitable woodcuts which have adorned several of my books, and will adorn the *Chaucer* which is now drawing near completion, my friend Sir Edward Burne-Jones has never lost sight of this important point, so that his work will not only give us a series of most beautiful and imaginative pictures, but form the most harmonious decoration possible to the printed book.”³

1. H. Halliday Sparling, *The Kelmscott Press and William Morris, Master Craftsman* (London, 1924); quoted in Fitzwilliam Museum 1980, p. 92.
2. “The Ideal Book,” paper read before the Bibliographical Society, London, June 19, 1893; quoted in Fitzwilliam Museum 1980, p. 91.
3. *A Note by William Morris on His Aims in Founding the Kelmscott Press, Together with a Short Description of the Press by S. C. Cockerell, and an Annotated List of the Books Printed Thereat* (Hammersmith, 1898), p. 6.

152.

Jacobus de Voragine (1230–1298)

The Golden Legend

Kelmscott Press, large 4to., printed in Golden type. Finished September 12, 1892, issued November 3, 1892; 500 paper copies (Peterson 1984, 47) Volume 1 of 3 vols., with two designs by Edward Burne-Jones, engraved by W. H. Hooper

EXHIBITED: Arts Council 1975–76, no. 281 (copy lent by William Morris Gallery)

a. The Pierpont Morgan Library, New York (PML10798–10800)

PROVENANCE: J. Pierpont Morgan

NEW YORK ONLY

b. Birmingham Central Reference Library

PROVENANCE: Purchased, 1892

BIRMINGHAM AND PARIS

One of the most popular books of the Middle Ages, *The Golden Legend* is a collection of the lives of the saints, compiled in the mid-thirteenth century by Jacobus de Voragine, a Dominican friar who became Archbishop of Genoa in 1292. Morris had hoped to make it the first product of the Kelmscott Press—hence the name given to the typeface in which it was printed—but he was hampered in not owning a copy of Caxton's 1483 edition, which had to be transcribed (by Phyllis Ellis, daughter of the scholar-publisher F. S. Ellis) from a copy borrowed from Cambridge University Library. Eventually published in September 1892, it was universally admired, Swinburne calling it “the most superbly beautiful book that ever, I should think, came from any press.”¹

Burne-Jones provided two designs, both of which appear in the first volume. *The Earthly Paradise* (facing page 105) depicts the expulsion of Adam and Eve from a stone-walled Garden of Eden, while *The Heavenly Paradise* (facing page 245), displayed



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here, offers a further variation on the type of battlemented celestial architecture drawn for the *Book of Common Prayer* (cat. no. 106), given to Frances Graham. Each image first appears in the “*Secret*” *Book of Designs* (cat. no. 140), and there is a preliminary drawing for Adam and Eve in the Newberry Library, Chicago.² J. W. Mackail recorded that both designs “were touched up for the wood-engraver [W. H. Hooper] by Mr. Fairfax Murray in a photographic copy.”³ One of these copies has survived, of the first subject, though it bears an inscription by Sydney Cockerell to the effect that the corrections were made by Burne-Jones himself.⁴

1. Quoted in Victoria and Albert Museum 1996, no. o.15.
2. British Museum, London (1899-7-13-478, 479); see also Stam 1978, pp. 339-44.
3. Mackail 1899, vol. 2, p. 279.
4. Arts Council 1975-76, no. 282 (private collection).

153.

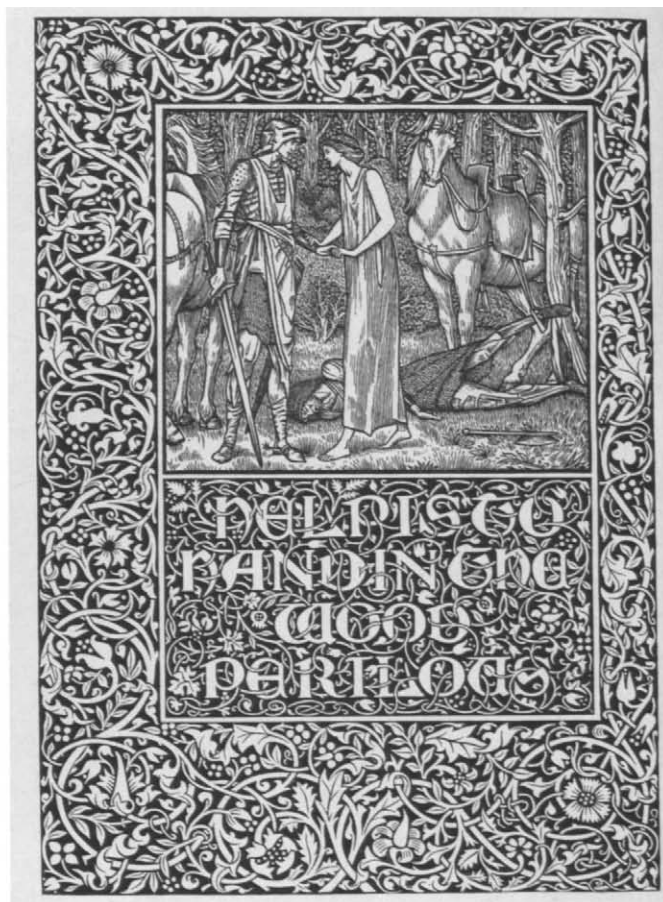
William Morris (1834-1896)

The Well at the World's End

1896

Kelmscott Press, 1896, large 4to., printed in Chaucer type. Finished March 2, 1896, issued June 4, 1896; 350 paper copies, 8 vellum (Peterson 1984, A39)

Four designs by Edward Burne-Jones, engraved by W. H. Hooper
EXHIBITED: Arts Council 1975-76, no. 287 (copy lent by the William Morris Gallery)



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a. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York. Harris Brisbane Dick Fund, 1917 (17.3.2641[13])
NEW YORK ONLY

b. Birmingham Central Reference Library
PROVENANCE: Purchased, 1896
BIRMINGHAM AND PARIS

A romance of old England, *The Well at the World's End* recounts the travels of Ralph and his three brothers, sons of the modest King Peter. An exercise in the manner of Malory, it is colored by what William Morris's daughter May called his “passion for the soil and loving observation of familiar country mingled with marvels beyond the sea. . . . No doubt the charm is rather a special one for the members of the writer's family, as the King's sons start on their adventures from the very door of Kelmscott Manor transformed into the palace of a simple-living kinglet.”¹

Remarkably, Morris began overseeing the first proofs at the Kelmscott Press in April 1892, before he had finished writing the book. It was first announced in December 1892, “with 4 woodcuts, designed by C. F. Murray,” but by the following spring Morris had assigned these to the Birmingham artist Arthur Gaskin (1862-1928), who made nineteen designs in all, some of which were engraved by W. H. Hooper.² Dissatisfied

with the results, he rejected these designs in February 1895 and turned instead to Burne-Jones, who produced the four illustrations engraved, as usual, by Hooper. The first, serving as the frontispiece, bears the legend "Help is to hand in the wood perilous," and shows Ralph rescuing a damsel from her two captors, one of whom lies dead at his feet.

1. May Morris, ed., *The Collected Works of William Morris*, vol. 18 (London, 1913), p. xix.
2. See *Arthur and Georgie Gaskin* (exh. cat., Birmingham: Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery, 1981).

154.

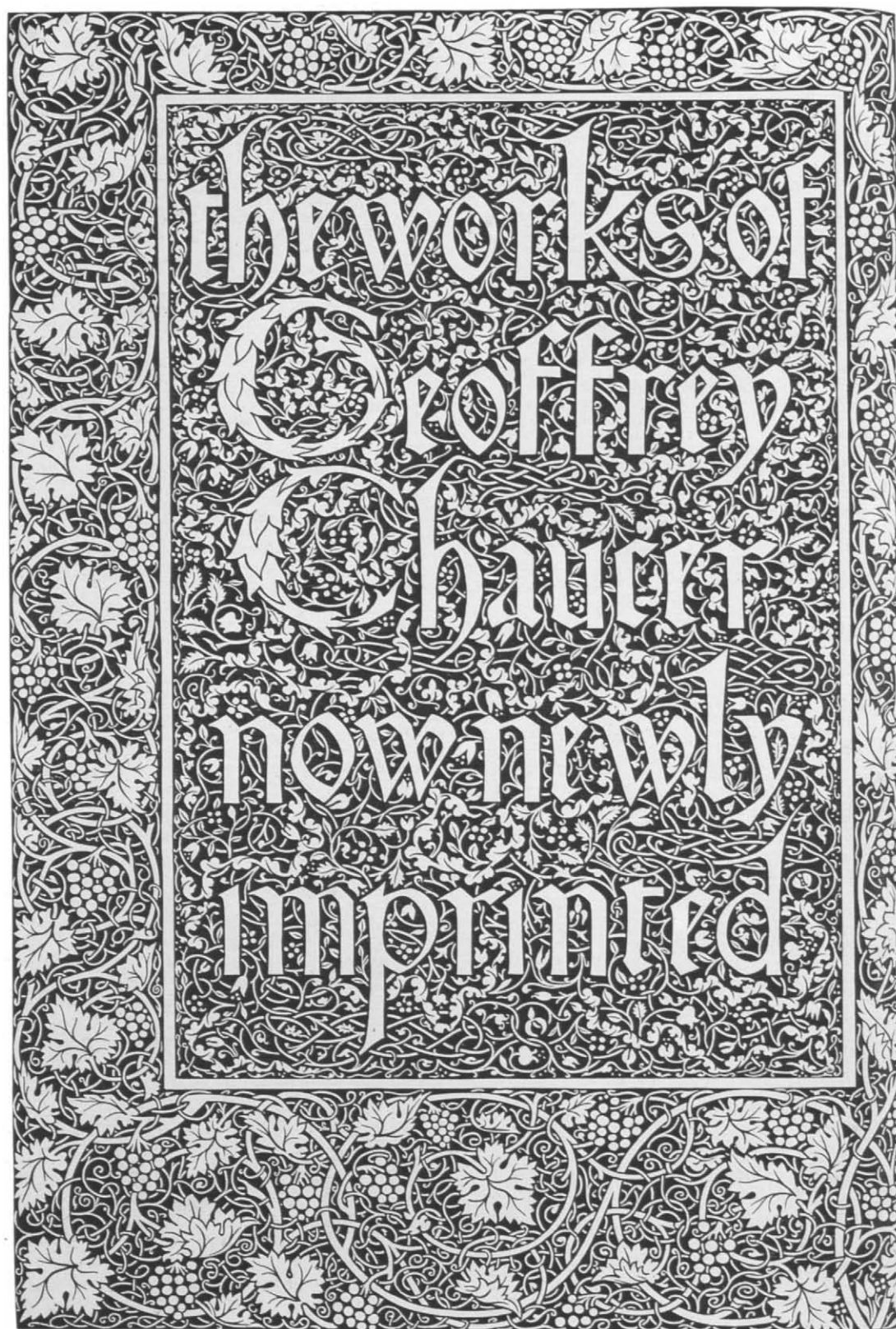
The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer

1896

Kelmscott Press, folio, printed in Chaucer type. Finished May 8, 1896, issued June 26, 1896; 425 paper copies, 13 vellum (Peterson 1984, A40)
With 87 designs by Burne-Jones, engraved by W. H. Hooper
 EXHIBITED: *Arts Council 1975–76, no. 289 (copy lent by the Rector and Scholars of Exeter College, Oxford)*

a. *The Pierpont Morgan Library, New York. Gift of John M. Crawford Jr., 1975 (PML76849)*
 PROVENANCE: *Presented by William Morris to Sydney Cockerell, July 7, 1896; gift of John M. Crawford Jr., 1975*
 NEW YORK ONLY

b. *Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery*
One of 48 copies bound in white pigskin by the Doves Bindery, from a design by William Morris
 PROVENANCE: *Presented by Colonel and Mrs. Wilkinson, in memory of Norman Wilkinson, 1934*
 BIRMINGHAM AND PARIS



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One of the pinnacles of the private press movement, the illustrated edition of *Chaucer* was, in the words of a contemporary critic, "the crowning achievement of the Kelmscott Press"¹ and the final masterpiece of Morris and Burne-Jones's lifelong collaboration. Given their mutual interest in Chaucer while at Oxford, and Burne-Jones's subsequent treatment of



"The Legend of Goode Wimmen" (cat. nos. 28, 29) and the *Romaunt of the Rose* (cat. nos. 72–81), it was inevitable that they would produce an edition for the Kelmscott Press: the idea of a companion volume of Malory's *Morte d'Arthur*, their other major love and inspiration, was discussed but died with Morris.²

Sydney Cockerell recorded in his diary for June 11, 1891, that Morris "thinks of printing a Chaucer from a blackletter fount which he hopes to design." A refined version of Troy type, this was ready for trial proofs in the summer of 1892, and by December the book was announced, "with about 60 designs by E. Burne-Jones."³ These he had begun in 1891, working on them at intervals when at Rottingdean, but he underestimated the time he would need, and in November 1894 subscribers were informed that "it has been found necessary for the due completion of the above work to add considerably to the number of woodcuts. . . . There will now be upwards of seventy of these." Having finished seventy, Burne-Jones wrote to Eleanor Leighton, "In three or four weeks I can breathe and look back on a longish task; and I shall be glad and sorry."⁴ The last of what proved to be eighty-seven designs was finished shortly before Christmas 1895. He had previously written to Frances Homer, "I have been calculating that the time I have given to the Chaucer work in the last two years and a half is exactly to an hour the time I should have spent in visits from Saturday to Monday at 'houses,' if I had been amiable and sociable—for I haven't let it invade the week's work, but have designed only on Sunday with very little exception. . . . I have been happy over it; it has never tired me but refreshed me always."⁵

As with Morris & Company stained-glass cartoons, an intermediate stage was necessary to translate the fine line of Burne-Jones's draftsman-ship into a form that could be followed by the engraver (the reliable W. H. Hooper). Morris brought in Robert Catterson-Smith, a versatile craftsman who later became Headmaster of the Birmingham School of Art, to make copies in pen and ink over pale platinotype photographs taken by Emery Walker; these were then rephotographed onto the woodblock. Describing his job as



Edward Burne-Jones, "Bless ye my children": Chaucer, Morris, and Burne-Jones, 1896. Pen and ink, 7 x 8 in. (17.7 x 20.3 cm). Bridwell Library, Southern Methodist University, Dallas

getting "rid of everything except the essential lines," Catterson-Smith worked literally at his master's elbow. Burne-Jones told Walker that "the cooperation between himself and Catterson-Smith, especially as the work progressed, was so perfect that increasingly [he] thought of his assistant as a tool in his hand."⁶ As they worked together, they discussed not only technical details but the whole tenor of the book, including the merits of F. S. Ellis's edition (for Morris) as against that of the leading Chaucer scholar W. W. Skeat, whose accomplishments Burne-Jones did not hold in especially high regard. They also teased Morris (never a difficult task), in December 1895 both wondering whether "to begin the Chaucer over again so that we might do it better." Burne-Jones did experience genuine difficulties over some of the designs, but Morris was always impatient: "I said 'I like a thing perfect,' and [Morris] says he likes a thing done."⁷

Printing had already begun in August 1894, and a second press was set up early in the following year to cope with the print run of 425 copies, increased by a hundred as Morris began to worry about the ultimate cost (which was over £7000; each of the paper copies sold for £20). Production ran into 1896, by which time Morris's health had severely declined. Rooke recorded his appearance at The Grange on March 2 as "very ghostlike, feeble & old looking." In response to Burne-Jones's attempt to cheer him by praising the book, Morris confessed to being "complacent about it—must try though not to be too

conceited. And there's one thing that's not to be forgotten, that you backed me up well in it, old chap. If you'd been at all slack over it and hadn't been as much excited about it as I was, we should never have got through with it."⁸ The first two copies were delivered to Morris and Burne-Jones on June 2, 1896, four months before Morris's death, and the book was issued at the end of the month. Burne-Jones was delighted with the result—perhaps more so than Morris—and confessed, "I love it. I turn it over page after page and gloat over it. It doesn't matter whether it's a picture or a page of print, they're equally beautiful."⁹ He even had the pleasure of "passing in a cab through a street up in London [and] something glorious flashed out of a shop window right into the cab, and looking at it with astonishment I had just time to see it was the Chaucer."¹⁰

While working on the designs, he had mused, "I know quite well not ten people in the land will care twopence about it,"¹¹ but he was of course proved wrong. The edition was fully subscribed by December 1894 and on its publication was widely described, by the writer Theodore Watts-Dunton among others, as "the most beautiful book ever printed." Swinburne, who had received a copy as a gift, added, "Chaucer must be dancing with delight round the Elysian fields."¹² F. G. Stephens judged the book to be "the finest monument to Chaucer's memory which the gratitude of his lovers has yet raised,"¹³ and on the same theme Burne-Jones made a celebratory drawing of Chaucer with himself and Morris, under the title "*Bless ye my children*."¹⁴

1. F. G. Stephens, in *Athenaeum*, October 3, 1896, p. 444: "In its own style the book is, beyond dispute, the finest ever issued, and it is pleasant to know that modern artists and craftsmen can meet the printers of the fifteenth century on their own ground and beat them easily."
2. In about 1892 Burne-Jones told Frances Horner, "Now it is printing he [Morris] cares for, and to make wonderful rich-looking books . . . and if he lives the printing will have an end—but not, I hope, before Chaucer and the *Morte d'Arthur* are done; then he'll do I don't know what, but every minute will be alive" (Horner 1933, pp. 14–15).
3. Fitzwilliam Museum 1980, p. 96; see also Peterson 1984, pp. 106–11.
4. *Memorials*, vol. 2, p. 259.
5. *Ibid.*
6. Peterson 1984, pp. xxix–xxx, where there is a detailed account of their method of working together.
7. Lago 1981, p. 64 (entry for December 5, 1895). When a visitor to the Press admired some of the later double-page illustrations, Morris warned: "Now don't you go saying that to Burne-Jones, or he'll be wanting to do the first part over again; and the worst of that would be, that he'd want to do all the rest over again, because the other would be so much better, and then we should never get done" (Mackail 1899, vol. 2, p. 322).
8. Quoted in Peterson 1984, p. 111.
9. Lago 1981, p. 111 (entry for July 15, 1896).
10. *Ibid.*, p. 109 (entry for ca. July 7, 1896); characteristically, Burne-Jones added: "There's very little of me in it—you know $\frac{3}{4}$ of it at least is Morris's." This followed his famous remark, in a letter to Charles Eliot Norton of December 20, 1894, "When the book is done . . . it will be like a pocket cathedral. My share in it is that of the carver of images at Amiens, and Morris's that of the Architect and Magister Lapidaria"; quoted in Fitzwilliam Museum 1980, p. 96.
11. Undated letter to Frances Horner, *Memorials*, vol. 2, p. 295.
12. Letter to Morris, July 14, 1896, in *The Swinburne Letters*, edited by Cecil Y. Lang, vol. 6, 1890–1909 (New Haven, 1962), p. 102. W. B. Yeats, who was presented with a copy of the *Chaucer* by friends on his fortieth birthday in 1905, called it "the most beautiful of all printed books"

(John Kelly, ed., *The Collected Letters of W. B. Yeats*, vol. 1, 1865–1895 [Oxford, 1986], p. 348).

13. *Athenaeum*, October 3, 1896, p. 445.

14. There are two versions of this drawing, one with the figures alone and the other with the inscribed title and a background of a London street, part of a letter of May 2, 1896, to his daughter; both are in the collection of the Bridwell Library, Perkins School of Theology, Southern Methodist University, Dallas, which also holds the vellum copy of the *Chaucer* presented by Morris to Burne-Jones in September 1896; see Bridwell Library 1996, nos. 23, 23A–L.

155.

The Parlement of Foules: Dancing Women

ca. 1892–95

Pencil, $5\frac{1}{4} \times 6\frac{1}{4}$ in. (13.3 x 17.2 cm; image); 7 x 10 in. (17.8 x 25.3 cm; sheet)

Inscribed in pencil by Sydney Cockerell: ASSEMBLY OF FOWLS NO IV / not engraved—it illustrates a passage on p. 319

PROVENANCE: Sir Philip Burne-Jones; Sir Sidney Cockerell; his sale, Sotheby's, December 10, 1956, lot 45; presented by John M. Crawford Jr., 1975

The Pierpont Morgan Library, New York. Gift of Mr. John M.

Crawford, Jr. (1975.50.9)

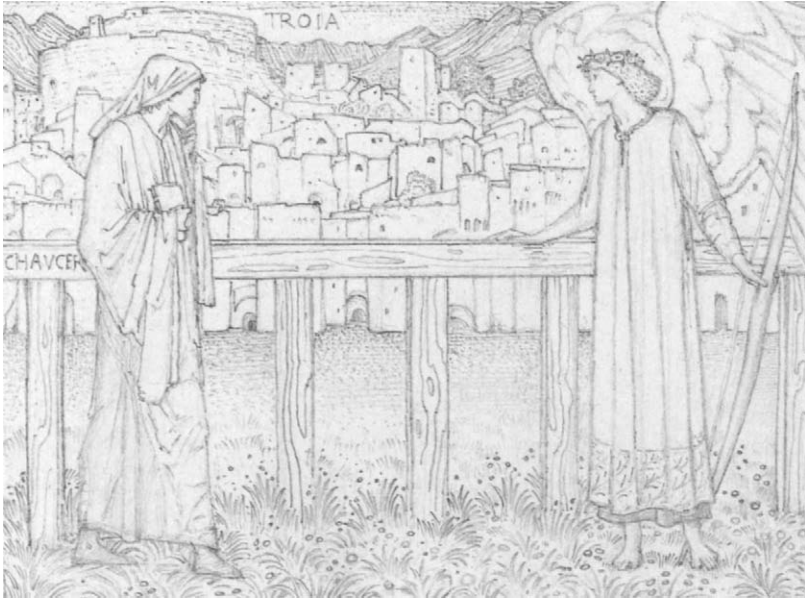
NEW YORK AND PARIS



Edward Burne-Jones, *The Parlement of Foules: Cupid's Forge*, ca. 1892–95. Pencil, $5\frac{1}{8} \times 6\frac{1}{2}$ in. (13 x 16.6 cm). Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge (1050–48)

In the six illustrations to the short poem “The Parlement of Foules,” Burne-Jones drew only a few of the many birds cited, concentrating on the subjects described in the dream of Scipio. The drawing for one of these (p. 316) is an instructive reworking





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of the 1861 watercolor *Cupid's Forge* (private collection).

Under a tree, besyde a welle, I say
Cupyd our lord his arwes forge and fyle;
And at his fete his bowe al redy lay,
And wel his doghter temperd al the whyle

In place of the soulful Rossettian figures, Cupid and his imagined "daughter" are given the linear animation of Burne-Jones's mature decorative style. As Sydney Cockerell's inscription records, the second drawing (reproduced here) is one of the rare designs not taken up, possibly in deference to the well-known livelier treatment of dancing girls drawn for the *Romaunt of the Rose* (p. 257). Ever loath to abandon a good design, Burne-Jones turned this into an independent drawing in gold on a blue ground (see cat. no. 168).

156.

Troilus and Criseyde: Chaucer with his Muse Thesiphone, one of the Furies, views Troy

ca. 1892–95

Pencil, $4\frac{3}{4} \times 6\frac{1}{4}$ in. (12 x 15.8 cm; image); $6\frac{1}{8} \times 10\frac{1}{8}$ in.

(17.4 x 25.6 cm; sheet)

Inscribed in pencil by Sydney Cockerell: beginning of
Troilus & Cressida / p. 470

PROVENANCE: Sir Philip Burne-Jones; Sir Sydney Cockerell; his sale,
Sotheby's, December 10, 1956, lot 45; presented by John M. Crawford Jr., 1975

The Pierpont Morgan Library, New York (1975.50.10)

NEW YORK AND PARIS

This is the first illustration to *Troilus and Criseyde*, the final poem in the Kelmscott *Chaucer*. Set at the siege of Troy, it again allowed Burne-Jones another gloss on a subject that continued to preoccupy him with work on the easel (see cat. no. 54), but this time it was at least brought to a satisfying conclusion. The designs to the poem are among the strongest and most sober, and reflect Burne-Jones's considered opinion of the complementary characters of Chaucer and Morris. "Troilus [is] a very long poem. . . I always think it was his most careful work, as the *Legend of Good Women* is the *least* careful. That looks as though he'd felt there was a great lot to tell and very little space to tell it in, and as if he were in a hurry to get it all in and couldn't. He's very much the same sort of person as Mr Morris; unless he can begin his tale at the beginning and go on steadily to the end, he's bothered. There's no ingenuity [ingenuousness?] in either of them, the value of their work comes from the extreme simplicity and beautiful directness of their natures."¹

1. Lago 1982, pp. 93–94 (entry for February 26, 1896).

“Pictured Abstractions”

Most of Burne-Jones’s studio properties were designed by the artist himself. Dresses tended to be made by Aglaia Coronio, yet another of the Ionides siblings, while the good-looking young architect and metalworker W. A. S. Benson, who sat to Burne-Jones for the head of Pygmalion and remodeled his Rottingdean house, made armor, crowns, and other three-dimensional objects (fig. 105). Burne-Jones’s purpose in designing these things was not only, in Georgie’s words, “expressly in order to lift them out of association with any historical time,”¹ but, as he said himself, to ensure that “what eventually gets onto the canvas is a reflection of a reflection of something purely imaginary.”²

Burne-Jones never made any bones about seeking to create a totally autonomous world. “I don’t want to pretend that this isn’t a picture,” he would say;³ and when someone claimed that it was a mistake for an artist to paint “out of his head,” he replied that, on the contrary, it was precisely “the place where I think pictures ought to come from.”⁴ His dislike of Impressionism, while partly a question of “finish,” was more fundamentally due to its materialism and what struck him as an essentially wrongheaded conceptual approach. “Realism? Direct transcript from nature?” he would ask. “What has that to do with art?”⁵

He had come far from the days when he had seen himself as a follower of the early Pre-Raphaelites, a group of painters who, like the Impressionists though in different terms, had

“pretended that this isn’t a picture.” Perhaps no other Victorian artist was so vividly aware that he was engaged in the business of creating pictorial fictions. Certainly none was more prepared to push this awareness to its logical conclusion. We have seen how Henry James, in reviewing the 1878 Grosvenor exhibition, had praised *Laus Veneris* (cat. no. 63) and *Le Chant d’Amour* (cat. no. 84) for having “the great and rare merit that they are *pictures* . . . conceptions, representations.” But James, after all, was an admirer of Sargent, indeed of the early Pre-Raphaelites; and by 1886 even he was having difficulties with Burne-Jones’s development. “I don’t understand . . . the manner and tenor of his production,” he told Charles Eliot Norton, “a complete *studio* existence, with doors and windows closed, and no search for impressions outside—no open air, no real daylight and no looking out for it. The things he does in these conditions have exceeding beauty—but they seem to me to grow colder and colder—pictured abstractions, less and less observed.”⁶ This, as we know, was precisely the artist’s intention, with his talk of being “better in a prison than in the open air always.” Increasingly he sought to forge a new pictorial language in accordance with an inner vision, to cut loose from the trammels of representation in a way that hovers on the brink of modernism. It was this, surely, that Robin Ironside had in mind when he argued that if Burne-Jones had not been eclipsed by Impressionism, his art “might well have brought forth a progressive symbolism

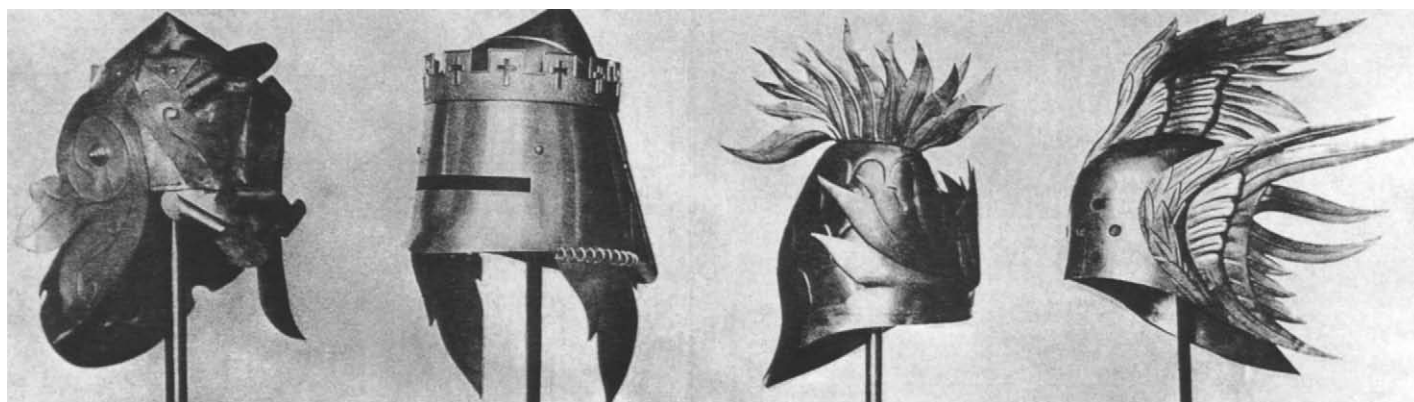


Figure 105. Crowns designed by Burne-Jones for use as studio properties, 1880s or 1890s. From photographs reproduced in Aymer Vallance, *The Decorative Work of Sir Edward Burne-Jones* (1900)



Figure 106. Edward Burne-Jones, possibly with the assistance of Charles Fairfax Murray (1849–1919), *Saint Cecilia*, after 1874, in a characteristic Burne-Jones frame in the Renaissance style. Watercolor, 64¼ x 22¾ in. (163.2 x 57.8 cm)

which would have rendered the compelling influences of modern French painting less disconcerting” (see page 2). There is a close parallel here with his French counterpart Puvis de Chavannes, whose relationship to the modern movement has been the subject of an entire exhibition, showing his influence on younger artists who developed the classical and abstract tendencies inherent in his style.⁷

There are certain aspects of Burne-Jones’s art that, though they may not have led to his most abstract productions, illustrate his antinaturalistic approach with particular force. The famous *Flower Book* (cat. nos. 135a–d), conceived in 1882, is a

case in point. Periodically Burne-Jones would make painstaking studies of flowers that he wished to introduce into his pictures, but the point of the *Flower Book* was not to represent flowers themselves but rather the literary subjects suggested by some of their more recondite or picturesque names. Similarly, his holidays at Rottingdean, far from resulting in any marked response to the coastal landscape, produced a number of paintings and drawings that featured mermaids and undersea life (cat. no. 119). It is true that he painted a picture called *The Spirit of the Downs*, now lost, but the word “spirit” is significant. It was the literary concept suggested by the downs, not the downs themselves, that mattered.

The best example of all is his attitude to portraiture. Burne-Jones’s popularity in the 1880s led to a number of portrait commissions, and these naturally raised the question of “nature” in a particularly acute form. “I do not easily get portraiture,” he wrote, “and the perpetual hunt to find in a face what I like, and leave out what dislikes me, is a bad school for it.”⁸ Not surprisingly, he was often most successful when painting a relative or friend whose physiognomy he knew well. His masterpiece in the genre is probably the portrait he painted in 1886 of his daughter (cat. no. 117), who, in a remarkable instance of nature imitating art, looked very like her father’s ideal.

William Graham died in 1885 and Frederick Leyland in 1892. Both collections were sold at Christie’s, and there was much speculation as to how Burne-Jones’s pictures would fare. In the event they fetched high prices, confirming their owners’ estimate of his talent and making him a safe investment. The top lot in the Graham sale was *Le Chant d’Amour* and in the Leyland sale *The Beguiling of Merlin* (cat. nos. 84, 64), fetching, respectively, 3,150 and 3,600 guineas, some £140,000 (\$238,000) and £160,000 (\$272,000) in today’s currency.

Meanwhile, in 1890 his career had reached its zenith with the exhibition of the four “definitive” Briar Rose paintings at Agnew’s. Graham, who owned the small versions and had declined the offer of these only because of their size, had negotiated the sale shortly before his death, at a time when he was virtually acting as Burne-Jones’s agent. The artist was paid £15,000 for the four canvases. It was by far the largest amount he had ever received and, as Graham had hoped, finally gave him long-term financial security.

The pictures were an enormous success. Their subject was particularly appealing, and Burne-Jones had exploited its possibilities to the full, introducing plenty of his most winning girls and adopting an unusually bright palette, with the pink of the briar rose itself providing the keynote. Crowds flocked to the exhibition, and praise was almost universal. As his *Times* obituary was to put it, “Thousands of the most cultivated people in London hastened to see, and passionately to

admire, the painter's masterpiece."⁹ In fact, great care was taken to ensure that the paintings were seen not only by "cultivated people" in the metropolis. After appearing at Agnew's they were exhibited in Liverpool, and the following year they were shown at Whitechapel, where the enterprising warden of Toynbee Hall, Canon Samuel Barnett, with the active cooperation of Burne-Jones, Watts, Holman Hunt, and other public-spirited artists, organized regular exhibitions of pictures as a source of enlightenment in the poverty-stricken East End. Meanwhile, the paintings had been bought by the financier Alexander Henderson (later 1st Baron Faringdon) to be installed in the saloon at Buscot Park, his eighteenth-century mansion in Oxfordshire (see illus. on p. 158). Each adorned a separate wall, with the sleeping princess herself (modeled by Margaret Burne-Jones, a circumstance that has led some to endow the paintings with autobiographical significance) above the fireplace. Burne-Jones made them into a continuous frieze by painting small connecting scenes and designing a gilt-wood framework, on which specially written poems by Morris were inscribed beneath the four main panels. The ensemble remains in situ to this day.

Burne-Jones's interest in the installation of the Briar Rose paintings was typical. He had strong views on the subject of framing, believing, for example, that "little pictures are good in vast frames but big ones frame themselves."¹⁰ In later life he particularly favored a handsome tabernacle frame, in the Renaissance style (fig. 106). *King Cophetua* itself (cat. no. 112) has a particularly fine example.

Further triumphs followed. In the winter of 1892 a retrospective exhibition of his work was held at the New Gallery, while Malcolm Bell published the first monograph on his work: *Edward Burne-Jones: A Record and Review*. The author may well have been Poynter's nephew; certainly he had access to Burne-Jones's own work record, and the book, despite many limitations, remains an essential source. In 1894 Burne-Jones accepted a baronetcy from his old friend Gladstone, following in the footsteps of Leighton and Millais, who had already been honored in this way. In view of his lifelong claim to be an antiestablishment figure, it was a move that understandably "surprised, amused and somewhat shocked his friends."¹¹ Morris and Georgie, both romantic socialists, were particularly dismayed.

But none of this outward success altered the drift of Burne-Jones's work toward a self-absorbed abstraction. During the 1890s he evolved an ever more uncompromising vision of disembodied, spiritualized figures in bleak, barren, or densely wooded landscapes (cat. nos. 41, 42, 74, 162). Color is drained almost to the point of monochrome, and drapery falls in heavy, Gothic folds, its cracked and broken forms often setting up a harsh visual dissonance (cat. no. 42). Even his portraits show

this development. That of Lady Windsor (cat. no. 161), his only full-length, is in one sense an attempt at a society portrait and an answer to Sargent. At the same time it is a bitter reproach to everything that Sargent stood for, showing the sitter, yet another "Soul," not as the brilliant socialite she was in real life but almost like a martyr going to her death, clad in what has aptly been described as "penitential garb."¹² Drapery (and this was something else that Ruskin could never understand) had always fascinated Burne-Jones, its inert substance offering the perfect vehicle for those linear rhythms that lay at the heart of his tendency to abstraction. "Almost the only times when his studio door was ever closed," Philip recalled, "were during these wrestlings with the folds of garments, about which he took quite infinite trouble."¹³ During his Botticellian phase drapery had swirled, danced, and fluttered, while in the 1880s it had taken on a semi-Byzantine character under the influence of the American Church mosaics. Now, in the 1890s, it assumed its last and sternest form.

It is no accident that this late drapery looks Gothic. "Burne-Jones," wrote Sydney Cockerell, "was not of the South, much as he tried to be."¹⁴ His great love affair with Italy had been one of those lengthy digressions which many artists feel compelled to make in mid-career; now, at the end of his life—and again the pattern is familiar—he was returning to his inspirational roots. This, above all, meant a revived interest in the *Morte d'Arthur*. The chief monument to this is *The Sleep of Arthur in Avalon* (fig. 107). Begun in 1881 as a commission from George Howard, the picture gradually assumed the status of a great personal statement, a swan song into which the artist poured his deepest feelings as his life neared its end. But it was only the most important of several Arthurian projects. About 1895 his friend Sebastian Evans began a translation of *Perceval le gallois*, a French medieval prose romance on the theme of the Holy Grail. Burne-Jones took the keenest interest in the book, liked Evans to read it to him as he worked, and contributed two illustrations when it was published, as *The High History of the Holy Graal*, in 1898. Another task that focused his attention on the legend was a commission from Henry Irving to design the sets and costumes for *King Arthur*, a play written by the versatile Comyns Carr and staged at the Lyceum Theatre in 1895, with Irving himself as the King and Ellen Terry as Guinevere. Burne-Jones viewed the scheme with mixed feelings, hating to see the story which had such private significance for him expressed in crude theatrical terms, but realizing that it was a compliment of sorts since the play had been specially written in order to harness his talent as the leading interpreter of Arthurian romance to the Lyceum stage. Irving was a great believer in this type of exploitation. He commissioned Alma-Tadema to stage *Coriolanus* and *Cymbeline*, while other productions were designed by Edwin Austin Abbey and by Seymour Lucas.



Figure 107. Edward Burne-Jones, *The Sleep of Arthur in Avalon*, 1881–98. Oil on canvas, 111 x 254 in. (282 x 645 cm). Museo de Arte de Ponce. The Luis A. Ferré Foundation, Inc.

Burne-Jones's conventional decorative work also reflected his renewed feeling for Malory. Leyland's tomb (1892) and the seal of the University of Wales (1894) are both Celtic in spirit, but the great example is the set of tapestries illustrating the Grail legend which he designed for William Morris in the early 1890s (cat. nos. 145–151). Morris too was returning to first principles, and together they embodied their love for the story in these monumental works, executed for Stanmore Hall, the Middlesex home of the Australian mining millionaire W. K. D'Arcy which Morris was decorating. The tapestries marked the climax of their collaboration in this field, and were generally regarded as one of the triumphs of the Arts and Crafts movement. Like the Lyceum *King Arthur*, however, they were the cause of regret, in this case because they were destined for the kind of moneyed and overupholstered ambience that the friends regarded with such intense distaste.

A slighter but more accurate expression of their values was the set of four small stained-glass windows illustrating the Grail legend which Burne-Jones designed in 1886 for his own house at Rottingdean (cat. no. 139). Angela Thirkell recalled that they were placed on a landing above a housemaid's sink. "All the un-self-consciousness, all the discomfort, and all the beauty of Pre-Raphaelitism," she wrote, "was epitomised in [this] small space. . . . The Holy Grail above a housemaid's sink, both needed, both a part of daily life. It is easy to laugh a little, but there was a splendid disregard of external values in this juxtaposition," which she felt "summed up the best part" of the Pre-Raphaelite philosophy.¹⁵

The friends were also pleasing themselves in the books

published by the Kelmscott Press, Morris's last great enterprise, launched in 1890. Burne-Jones illustrated twelve of the sixty-six titles that were issued before the Press closed shortly after Morris's death, and here again he found ample scope for his resurgent medievalism. Now his subject was Caxton's *Order of Chivalry*; now the Thornton Romances, which he and Morris had read at Oxford, and one of which had inspired his murals at Red House; now again Morris's late prose romances, *The Wood beyond the World* (1894) and *The Well at the World's End* (cat. no. 153), in which spiritual remoteness and formal mannerism combine to create an effect comparable to that of his own final style. All this, however, pales before the crowning achievement of the Press, the folio *Chaucer*, for which Burne-Jones designed no fewer than eighty-seven woodcuts (cat. nos. 154–156). Nor was this the limit of the friends' intention to give new form to old enthusiasms. A folio *Froissart* was started in 1892, Burne-Jones undertaking to design a frontispiece, and there was talk of a *Morte d'Arthur* to rival the *Chaucer* in splendor and, by implication, to put Beardsley's impertinent version firmly in its place. But this was not even begun.

It was the ever watchful and protective Georgie who noted that in his last years Burne-Jones "seemed . . . to live more and more within himself" (fig. 108). The building of an ivory tower that constitutes one of his strongest claims to be a Symbolist became ever more of a necessity. "I need nothing but my hands and my brain," he said, "to fashion myself a world to live in that nothing can disturb. In my own land I am king of it."¹⁶ This sense of an elderly artist retreating into himself to

explore a personal vision that makes no concessions to popular taste is a well-recognized phenomenon. Michelangelo, Poussin, Turner, Beethoven, Liszt—there is no shortage of comparisons. Psychologists speak of a “third period” in the life of a creative artist, a final phase “when communication with others tends to be replaced by works depending more upon solitary meditation.”¹⁷

In Burne-Jones’s case, as no doubt in many others, alienation and withdrawal were encouraged by failing health. He had never been robust, suffering throughout his life from periods of exhaustion and collapse. Some of this may have been caused by the neglect he had suffered in earliest childhood; Ann Sampson, the housekeeper who had been brought in by a friend of his dead mother, had found him languishing “after passing through the hands of one incompetent nurse after another.”¹⁸ But the problem was also nervous in origin. “The ideal or imaginative side of his nature overbalances him,” Norton wrote in 1872, “and life is anything but easy and tranquil for him.”¹⁹ Perhaps this was also what Herbert Asquith had in mind when, writing to Frances Horner after Burne-Jones’s death, he urged her to remember that “you above all others lightened and enriched his difficult life.”²⁰ Now to constitutional weaknesses were added the infirmities of old age. In May 1891 he suffered a severe attack of influenza from which he never fully recovered. In the spring of 1892 he had to undergo an eye operation, and there were worries about his heart. The deaths of old friends brought further intimations of mortality. Rossetti had gone in 1882, Madox Brown in 1893, Leighton and Millais in 1896. Worst of all was Morris’s death in October of that year, a shattering blow that left him with an appalling sense of isolation.

The longing to “fashion a world that nothing could disturb” was fueled by a conviction that the real world was becoming uglier. There was much truth in this so far as his immediate surroundings were concerned. When he and Georgie had discovered The Grange, on a Sunday afternoon walk with the Irish poet William Allingham (1824–1889), it still enjoyed the rural setting that had made it Samuel Richardson’s country retreat. Over the years, however, the lanes and fields had been developed, until the house and its large garden, dominated by a huge mulberry tree, were an oasis of peace and beauty among the mean, jerry-built streets of late-Victorian Fulham. “All about us,” Burne-Jones wrote in 1889, “the streets have grown so hateful—noisy, rowdy, blackguardly—it is often well-nigh unendurable.”²¹

By the late 1890s his lament had become more general. The whole world, it seemed, wanted “to go back into barbarism. It is sick and tired of all the arts; it is tired of beauty, it is tired of taking care, it is tired of a great many things.”²² It was certainly tired of his own artistic values, and he was acutely aware

that his work no longer enjoyed its former popularity. Such extraordinary success was bound to bring a reaction, and besides, times were changing. In his book *The Rise and Fall of the Man of Letters* (1969), John Gross refers to this phenomenon in relation to literature: “There is also the large, vague but very real question of the whole late Victorian mood. Whatever one puts it down to—economic difficulties, foreign competition—it is undoubtedly possible to detect by the 1880s a widespread faltering of Victorian self-confidence, a new edginess and uncertainty about the future. Among writers such a climate might have been supposed to favour a mood of determined realism, and so, in some cases, it did. But the commonest reaction was withdrawal.”²³ Much the same development is discernible in painting. The loss of confidence manifested itself in the way great “machines” and literary and historical subjects rapidly went out of fashion, while the ascendancy of realism, the trend Burne-Jones so loathed and feared, was marked by the founding in 1886 of the New English Art Club and the rise of the Newlyn school of English impressionists—Stanhope Forbes, Frank Bramley, and others. Many who had espoused literary subjects, especially academic artists of the younger generation, diversified their output by painting more commercial types of picture, such as portraits and landscapes; but despite his occasional ventures into portraiture when pressed by a friend or the importunate

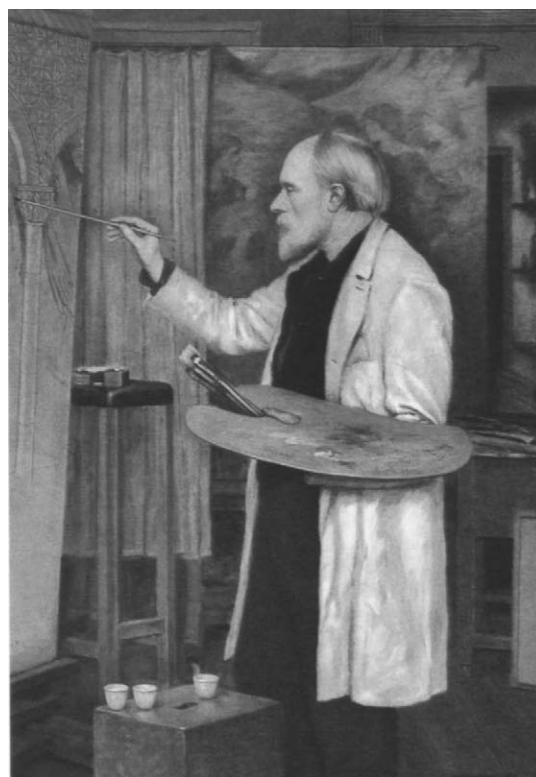


Figure 108. Philip Burne-Jones (1861–1926), *Edward Burne-Jones*, 1898. Oil on canvas, 29½ x 21 in. (74.9 x 53.3 cm). National Portrait Gallery, London

Baronne Deslandes, this course was not really open to the elderly and ailing Burne-Jones. Shortly after his death, Henry James wrote of him at this period: "He had, essentially, to my vision, really *done*. And he was very tired, and his cup was . . . about as full as it would hold."²⁴

Granted that Gross is right in suggesting that the faltering of artistic confidence in Britain in the late nineteenth century was related to the first intimations of imperial decline, it may seem strange that Burne-Jones had ever been sustained by the old certainties. It is not difficult to see the great "machines" of an establishment figure like Leighton as an expression of national assurance, but surely not those of Burne-Jones, with his Little England political views, his distaste for the colonialist Cecil Rhodes, his reputation among his friends for being "a strong, almost a bitter, republican," for whom "the condition of society in England is . . . a scandal and a reproach."²⁵ To jump to such conclusions, however, would be naive. The mood of confidence and buoyancy was too pervasive, and the scale and ambition of *King Cophetua* (cat. no. 112) reflect it even if the subject itself is a passionate denial of triumphalism. Besides, Leighton, Watts, and their like were friendly rivals, setting an agenda that was not to be ignored. It is perhaps even worth recalling how the imperial idea entered the day-to-day lives of the Burne-Joneses through the Kipling family.

In fact, Burne-Jones did make certain concessions to the new artistic climate. Acutely aware that his pictures were not selling, he began to turn out potboilers, notably in the form of pretty and rather facile drawings in gouache and gold paint on colored paper, for which he found there was a ready market (cat. nos. 164, 165). He tried to complete old pictures that he knew would be hard to sell if he died leaving them unfinished (cat. nos. 41–43, 74). Unfortunately, he also retouched a number of early works, by no means to their improvement. The Saint George series (cat. nos. 31, 33, 34) is a case in point. Sold by Birket Foster in 1894, the paintings were bought by Agnew's and reworked before being exhibited at Munich in 1897, suffering much from the discrepancy between their original style and that of the overwork thirty years later.

Beyond this, he continued to work much as usual, with predictable results. When *Love Leading the Pilgrim* (cat. no. 74), his last large-scale finished work, was exhibited at the New Gallery in 1897, it returned to the studio unsold, something that had never happened in the old days. As for *Arthur in Avalon* (fig. 107), visitors to the studio seemed lukewarm about this colossal picture, which summed up in its heroic scale and highly personal literary theme everything that meant so much to him and so little to a rapidly changing world. All this he accepted philosophically. "I must be prepared for public weariness about me," he told Rooke. "I've had

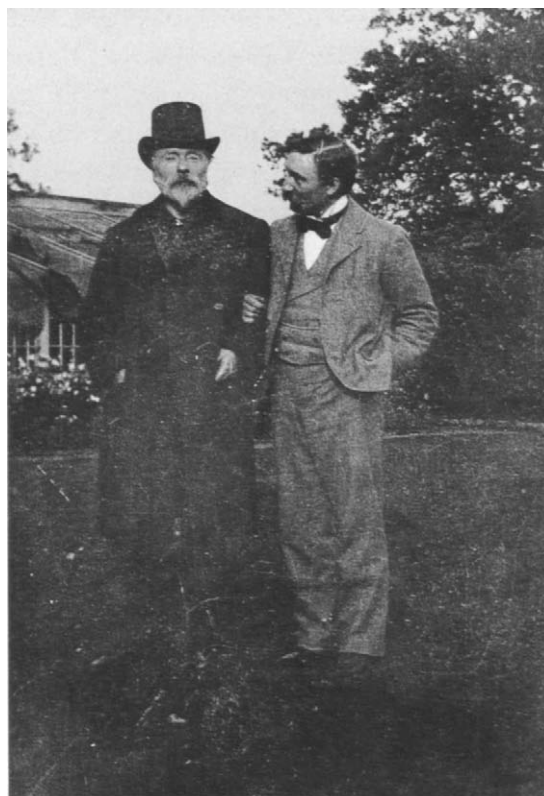


Figure 109. Edward Burne-Jones in old age with his son, Philip

a good innings . . . the rage for me is over."²⁶ But there was bitterness as well. When William Sharp met him in Trafalgar Square a few weeks before his death, he spoke of pictures that he still wished to paint, then added, "But there, you don't expect a spent horse to win a race. Let us say no more about my work. I have done what I could. As for what I have told you, well, we all love to live among our dreams." Sharp had found him "murmuring to himself as he came along," and was struck by "how much older he looked than when I had seen him a few months before; how worn; and apparently how more than ever given over to [the] interior life [fig. 109]."²⁷

Burne-Jones died suddenly of a heart attack in the early hours of June 17, 1898. He was still only sixty-five, hardly more than middle-aged by modern standards. To many friends and acquaintances the news came as a shock, but his family, having watched his health decline, were less surprised. On June 22 his ashes were interred in the churchyard at Rottingdean in the presence of family and a few friends. There was nothing incongruous about a Christian burial. It is sometimes assumed that because he decided not to go into the Church, he had also lost his faith, but this was not the case. It is true he was not a churchgoer. His Sunday mornings were generally spent in the studio with Morris, working and discussing current projects, while in the afternoon he and Georgie were at home to their friends. He was even capable of making

derogatory comments about established religion. "Belong to the Church of England? Put your head in a bag!" was one such saying.²⁸ But he could also write, "I never doubt for a moment the real presence of God, I should never debate about it any more than I should argue about beauty, and the things I most love." Speaking about his mother toward the end of his life, he began, "If ever I see her, . . ." then corrected himself: "But we won't say 'if'—*when* I see her: let us die in the faith."²⁹ His response to religion was intensely romantic, almost mystical. "I love Christmas Carol Christianity," he told Rooke. "I couldn't do without Medieval Christianity. The central idea of it and all it has gathered to itself made the Europe that I exist in."³⁰ Speaking of the subject of the Nativity that he had painted in *The Star of Bethlehem* (cat. no. 141), he said, "It is too beautiful not to be true."³¹

The day after the funeral a memorial service was held in Westminster Abbey. The venue was due to the intervention of the Prince of Wales and other influential figures, and it was the first time that an artist had been so honored. The great building was packed, and by his own admission the *Times* reporter missed many of the names, although his account gives a fair sample. Georgie, Philip, Lady Poynter, and Kipling were among members of the family present. There were old friends like George Howard and Percy Wyndham; masses of "Souls"—Arthur Balfour, George Curzon, Alfred and Spencer Lyttelton, Lord and Lady Windsor; and from even higher echelons of society the Duke of Devonshire (represented), the Duchess of Leeds, the Countesses of Galloway and Jersey. Sir William Agnew, Burne-Jones's dealer, was there, together with representatives of worlds that had meant much to the painter—literature (Sir Leslie Stephen, Sidney Colvin), music (Sir Hubert Parry), philanthropy (John Passmore Edwards). Last but not least, the congregation included many artists: Alma-Tadema, William Blake Richmond, Sir Wyke Bayliss, Walter Crane (or at least his wife), Briton Rivière, who had been responsible for proposing Burne-Jones as an Associate of the Royal Academy, and Arthur Severn, who would have come partly to represent Ruskin, now in his last, silent, mentally clouded years at Brantwood. Old Sir Frederick Burton, artist and for many years director of the National Gallery, who had supported Burne-Jones by resigning with him from the Old Water-Colour Society in 1870, was unable to attend, "to his deep regret, on account of infirm health."³²

A month later, with a speed perhaps dictated by the family's awareness of how rapidly taste was changing, a studio sale was held at Christie's. It realized the healthy sum of £29,500–13–6, some £1,250,000 (\$2,125,000) in present currency. That winter an enormous memorial exhibition was mounted at the New Gallery, followed in 1899 by a show of drawings at the Burlington Fine Arts Club. Meanwhile, Malcolm Bell's

Edward Burne-Jones: A Record and Review had run into its fourth edition and was soon joined by other publications, notably an account of the decorative work by Aymer Vallance, issued as the *Art Journal's* Easter Annual in 1900, and Fortunée de Lisle's modest but still useful monograph, published by Methuen as one of their *Little Books on Art* in 1904. Above all, this year saw the appearance of Georgie's two-volume *Memorials*. On Burne-Jones's death she had given up the beleaguered Grange, which was taken over by Fairfax Murray as a repository for his works of art. Retiring to Rottingdean, she devoted six years to her labor of love, the only book she ever wrote and a task, we are told, she was both glad and loath to finish. Intimates like Fairfax Murray realized that she had treated the story with a good deal of discretion. Even Norton, while full of admiration, felt that her "likeness" of her subject was "imperfect."³³ But the book was generally regarded as a triumph. It "has been very well received as it deserves to be," Jane Morris told Wilfrid Scawen Blunt after a visit to Rottingdean, "every post brought letters of congratulation from friends and others."³⁴

None of this, however, was essentially more than a reflection of past glory, made momentarily brighter by nostalgia now that the artist was dead. The underlying reaction to his work continued, and by 1914 Sickert could write that "the Burne-Jones attitude is almost intolerable to the present generation."³⁵ One who certainly found it so was that pillar of Bloomsbury Vanessa Bell. On reading the *Memorials* two years later she could only find its subject "perfectly awful and provincial," a humbug with a nauseating sense of his "holy mission" and a fatal ignorance of "the whole of French art of this time."³⁶ Can this really be the same man Henry James had described as "the most distinguished artistic figure" of his day, and a personality in which "no false note" could be found?³⁷

The key word here is "attitude." If Vanessa Bell had read the *Memorials* carefully, she would have found plenty of evidence that Burne-Jones was aware of contemporary French painting, quite apart from making those quasi-Post-Impressionist statements of principle that have been quoted. But none of this counted, because the general values he stood for had become repellent, as they would remain for at least another three decades. Similarly, today we respond positively to Burne-Jones not because we have discovered in him those "formal qualities" that loomed so large for the Bloomsbury generation, or even, principally, because we recognize better than they did that he is a figure of European significance and a precursor of modernism. He is popular because we can once again accept his "attitude."

Why this is so is a matter for speculation. Is it simply a case of the wheel of taste inexorably turning? Is it primarily escapism, from the horrors of modern life into what Burne-

Jones said he “meant” by a picture—“a beautiful romantic dream of something that never was, never will be—in a light better than any light ever shone . . . and the forms divinely beautiful”?³⁸ Or is there something in the modern psyche that responds to an art of “nervous irritability,” which reflects “a troubled and transitional age”? In other words, has what seemed so “modern” to the Victorians now become modern again? Certainly the materialism that “troubled” them is still with us, even if, by definition, it is no longer “new and strange.”

We tend to be aware of dramatic changes in the way Burne-Jones is perceived because we are still close to, if not caught up in, the cycle of denigration and reappraisal. But Pre-Raphaelitism and Symbolism were never meant to be easy options. Designed to challenge, provoke, and appeal to irrational instincts, they continue to do all these, as indeed they should. Burne-Jones in particular seems difficult to approach dispassionately. So adept is he at evoking an imaginary world and touching a certain vein of poetry that the critical faculty is either suspended or it overreacts. Contemporaries, as we have seen, were violently for him or against him, and both the long posthumous eclipse and the rapturous modern revival demonstrate his astonishing capacity to get under the skin, to infuriate or to thrill. He speaks particularly to youthful idealism, yet even if, with age and experience, we become a little more detached, a shade more conscious of limitations and lapses, we can still feel the old sorcery at work and marvel at his ability to project what du Maurier called his “special glamour, the Burne-Jonesiness of Burne-Jones.”³⁹ The writer from the *Times* criticized above (page 1) for “[loving him] for what he meant to our youth” may have been unnecessarily patronizing, but at least one sees what he meant.

Times are changing. The further the old controversies fade into the past, the less Burne-Jones appears to be a special case. His career has so many dimensions that he presents scholars with an almost limitless field, and they are constantly refining the process of alignment, seeing him in relation to Ruskinian ideology, Whistlerian Aestheticism, contemporary art-historical developments, the New Sculpture, international Symbolism, and so on. All this is valuable in dispersing the clouds of mystification and helping us to appreciate his true interest and importance, but it gets us only so far. Anyone who has written on Burne-Jones will have had the salutary experience of realizing that however carefully and subtly he has constructed his critical apparatus, the picture he is writing about, once he puts away his books and photographs and confronts the object itself, slips effortlessly from his grasp. No doubt this is true of all works of art, but there is something gently but insistently mocking about these particular pictures, as there was about the painter himself. *The Garden of Pan* (cat. no. 120) is not the only work by Burne-Jones that represents a rebuke to

“wit and wisdom,” warning us not to be too earnest, and beseeching us, if we must discuss and analyze, to do so with a light touch. Henry James, who serves the Burne-Jones scholar so well in so many contexts, has a pertinent comment here too. “When one considers them,” he wrote in reviewing the 1882 Grosvenor, “one really feels that there is a want of discretion and of taste in attempting to talk about Mr Burne-Jones’s pictures at all, much more in arguing and wrangling about them. They are there to care for if one will, and to leave to others if one cannot.”⁴⁰

1. *Memorials*, vol. 2, pp. 145–46.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 261.
3. *Ibid.*
4. *Ibid.*, p. 223.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 261.
6. Percy Lubbock, ed., *The Letters of Henry James* (London, 1920), vol. 1, p. 126.
7. Richard J. Wattenmaker, *Puvis de Chavannes and the Modern Tradition* (exh. cat., Toronto: Art Gallery of Ontario, 1975).
8. *Memorials*, vol. 1, p. 299.
9. *Times* (London), June 18, 1898, p. 13.
10. *Memorials*, vol. 2, p. 215.
11. *Times* (London), June 18, 1898, p. 13.
12. Abdy and Gere 1984, p. 123.
13. Burne-Jones 1917, p. 34.
14. Viola Meynell, ed., *Friends of a Lifetime: Letters to Sydney Carlyle Cockerell* (London, 1940), p. 134.
15. Thirkell 1931, pp. 122–23.
16. *Memorials*, vol. 2, p. 337.
17. Anthony Storr, *The School of Genius* (London, 1988), p. 169.
18. *Memorials*, vol. 1, p. 2.
19. Sara Norton and M. A. DeWolfe Howe, eds., *Letters of Charles Eliot Norton* (London, 1913), vol. 1, p. 448.
20. Horner 1933, pp. 110–11.
21. *Memorials*, vol. 2, p. 199.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 343.
23. John Gross, *The Rise and Fall of the Man of Letters* (1969; Pelican ed., London, 1973), pp. 145–46.
24. Lubbock, *Letters of Henry James*, vol. 1, p. 316.
25. Norton and Howe, *Letters of Charles Eliot Norton*, vol. 1, p. 343.
26. T. M. Rooke, notes, pp. 208, 399, typescript, National Art Library, Victoria and Albert Museum, London, but one phrase is quoted in *Memorials*, vol. 2, p. 323.
27. *Fortnightly Review*, August 1898, pp. 292–93.
28. Lago 1981, p. 27.
29. *Memorials*, vol. 2, p. 325.
30. Lago 1981, p. 27.
31. *Memorials*, vol. 2, p. 209.
32. *Times* (London), June 23, 1898, p. 9.
33. Norton and Howe, *Letters of Charles Eliot Norton*, vol. 1, p. 351.
34. Peter Faulkner, *Wilfrid Scawen Blunt and the Morris*, First Annual Kelmscott Lecture, given at the Society of Antiquaries, London, September 30, 1980 (London: William Morris Society, 1981), p. 42.
35. Osbert Sitwell, ed., *A Free House! Or, The Artist as Craftsman: The Writings of Walter Richard Sickert* (London, 1947), p. 280.
36. Frances Spalding, *Vanessa Bell* (London, 1983), p. 152.
37. Lubbock, *Letters of Henry James*, vol. 1, pp. 126, 136.
38. Burlington Fine Arts Club 1899, p. vii.
39. Quoted in *Memorials*, vol. 2, p. 231.
40. James 1956, p. 208.



157.

The Sirens

ca. 1891–98

Oil on canvas, 84 x 120 1/4 in. (213.4 x 305 cm)

PROVENANCE: Sir George Holford, Dorchester House, London

EXHIBITED: Herron Museum of Art 1964, no. 14

Collection of The John and Mabel Ringling Museum of Arts, Sarasota, Florida. Bequest of John Ringling (SN422)

The idea for a major painting on the subject of the Sirens first occurred to Burne-Jones during the eventful year of 1870; his retrospective record of work for that year includes the entry “Designed the triptych of Troy and the Sirens and began the oil picture of the Mill, and made studies for the Hours, & Pygmalion.”¹ There is a possible connection with the “lyrical drama” that Rossetti was considering at much the same time, under the title “The Doom of the Sirens,” but this project was never realized. In his record for 1872 Burne-Jones refers again to the subject as one “which above all others I desire to paint,” although a first design is not mentioned until 1880.

It was another ten years before he began work in earnest, writing to his patron Frederick Leyland: “I am making a plan for a picture that will not be very big and will need to be very pretty. It is a sort of Siren-land—I don’t know when or where—not Greek Sirens, but any sirens, anywhere, that lure men on to destruction. There will be a shore full of them,

looking out from rocks and crannies in the rocks at a boat full of armed men, and the time will be sunset. The men shall look at the women and the women at the men, but what happens afterwards is more than I care to tell.”² His immediate reference may have been to the substantial sketch in bodycolor,³ which must have been followed by two larger and more detailed designs in pastel,⁴ before work was finally undertaken on the huge oil, destined never to be completed. The bevy of beautiful female figures provided the need (or the excuse) for many individual head studies, all dated 1895 or 1896, which rank among his most delicate pencil drawings.⁵

Even among the many enigmatic juxtapositions of stilled female figure groups in which Burne-Jones delighted, *The Sirens* holds an exceptional place in its ghostly evocation of sexual tension, or what might better be called emotional dread. Both the designs and the large oil itself are painted in the idiosyncratic tones of deep blue, green, and yellow that reinforce the artist’s expressed wish to convey in his pictures “a beautiful romantic dream of something that never was, never will be—in a light better than any light that ever shone—in a land no one can define or remember, only desire.”⁶

1. Edward Burne-Jones, “List of my designs drawings and pictures [etc.],” Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge (transcript at Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery).

2. *Memorials*, vol. 2, p. 222.

3. Sotheby’s, November 3, 1993, lot 201 (19 7/8 x 27 3/8 in.).



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4. Harrison and Waters 1973, colorpl. 41 (private collection), and South African National Gallery, Cape Town; both approximately 67 x 90½ in.
5. Burlington Fine Arts Club 1899, nos. 31 (1896), 96 (1895), 109 (1895); Herron Museum of Art 1964, no. 30 (1895); Fogg Art Museum, Harvard University (1896).
6. This famous remark, from a letter to a friend (probably Helen Gaskell), was first quoted by Cosmo Monkhouse in his introduction to Burlington Fine Arts Club 1899, p. vii.

158.

Study for "The Sirens"

1895

Pencil, 17¾ x 13 in. (44.1 x 33 cm)

Signed and dated: EB-J 1895 for the picture of the SIRENS

PROVENANCE: Presented by Arthur S. Dixon, 1898

EXHIBITED: Art Services International 1995–96, no. 117

Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery (1898P45)

159.

The Wizard

ca. 1891–98

Oil on canvas, 36 x 21¼ in. (91.5 x 54 cm)

PROVENANCE: First studio sale, Christie's, July 16, 1898, lot 88; presented by Sir John Holder, 1912

EXHIBITED: New Gallery 1898–99, no. 42; Arts Council 1975–76, no. 193

Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery (1912P17)

BIRMINGHAM ONLY

begun in about 1891, this picture has much of the same enigmatic quality as *King Cophetua and the Beggar Maid* (cat. no. 112), with a similar feeling of tense, unspoken narrative. In the depiction of an old man revealing to a young woman the image of a shipwreck, there is an obvious association to be made with the opening of Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, although the artist made no recorded reference to the figures being those of Prospero and Miranda; he called it simply his "Maiden and Necromancer picture."¹ The girl's face is that of Frances Horner, the daughter of Burne-Jones's principal patron, William Graham, and perhaps there is an element of fanciful autobiography to be read into the subject, as one of the artist conjuring up visions in his studio to entrance his beautiful young friend and model.

Burne-Jones returned to the work several times over the next few years, without quite bringing it to completion. In conversation with T. M. Rooke in 1896 he referred to it as "one of my failures, it always stuck,"² but this dissatisfaction can be partly explained by his avowedly hopeless longing "to do a picture like a Van Eyck and I've *never never* done it, and never



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shall. As a young man I've stood before that picture of the man and his wife and made up my mind to try and do something as deep and rich in colour and as beautifully finished in painting, and I've gone away and never done it, and now the time's gone by."³ In February 1897, when he was painting the copper vessels and tripod, he went again to the National Gallery to look at Jan van Eyck's *Portrait of Giovanni Arnolfini and His Wife, Giovanna Cenami* (1434), but saw only "how clearly the like of it is not to be done by me. I should think it's the finest picture in the world."⁴

There are two compositional studies in colored chalks, one showing only the figures, the other with all the interior detail, though with a simpler form of brazier.⁵

1. Lago 1981, p. 84 (entry for January 18, 1896). Under 1897 in his work record, Burne-Jones entered the note: "worked on the picture of the Sorcerer, not yet named" (Burne-Jones 1900, p. 161). The title *The Wizard* seems to date from the New Gallery exhibition of 1898–99.
2. Lago 1981, p. 84 (entry for January 18, 1896).
3. Ibid., p. 132 (entry for February 3, 1897).
4. Ibid., p. 136 (entry for February 19, 1897).
5. Sold at Christie's, October 27, 1970, lot 213, and Christie's, June 15, 1971, lot 139, respectively.

160.

Vespertina Quies

1893

Oil on canvas, 42½ x 24½ in. (107.9 x 62.2 cm)

Signed and dated: EBJ 1893

PROVENANCE: Mrs. Maurice Beddington; bequeathed by Miss Maud Beddington, 1940

EXHIBITED: New Gallery, London, 1894, no. 136

Tate Gallery, London (N05176)

Among Burne-Jones's later oil paintings are a number of half- or three-quarter-length female figures with no connection to previous designs for stained glass. *Flamma Vestalis* (private collection), shown at the Grosvenor Gallery in 1886, is a pensive, idealized portrait of his daughter, Margaret, in the guise of one of the vestal virgins of Rome. When it was exhibited at the New Gallery in 1894, *Vespertina Quies* was seen by the critic Frederic Stephens as "a sort of pendant" to *Flamma Vestalis*, both figures being dressed in deep, rich blue. Stephens identified the background as "the empty courtyard of a convent," suggesting that the young woman, contemplatively fingering her ring, might be about to take the veil as a nun, thereby finding "that inner peace which belongs to a pure soul in harmony with itself."¹ Burne-Jones gave no specific accompanying narrative; the title means simply "Quiet of the Evening," though the enigmatic nature of the picture inevitably encourages the same sort of speculation about its meaning as such clear precedents as the *Mona Lisa*.

The sitter was Bessie Keene, a favorite model, as her mother had been before her. Graham Robertson recalled that Burne-Jones "used Bessie's face much in his later work—she succeeded her mother as chief 'angel' and 'nymph'—and he produced one beautiful portrait of her; actually a portrait, though he called the picture *Vespertina Quies*."² Progress on the canvas was watched by the young Maud Beddington, whose mother had been a neighbor of Burne-Jones in Bennett's Hill, Birmingham. "He began by drawing the figure in raw umber," she remembered. "I think that was done before I came. Then he modelled the face in white and raw umber, lightly putting a little red on the lips, nostrils, and eyes—the blue of the frock and all the strong colours were painted in sweeping strokes of full colour. He used a mixture of spike oil and turpentine as a medium. He used flat brushes to keep his canvas smooth."³

1. *Athenaeum*, May 12, 1894, p. 619.

2. Robertson 1931, p. 282.

3. Quoted in Harrison and Waters 1973, p. 158.



161.

Lady Windsor

1893–95

Oil on canvas, 78½ x 37½ in. (199.5 x 95.5 cm)

Signed and dated: EBJ 1893

PROVENANCE: By descent in the sitter's family

EXHIBITED: New Gallery, London, 1895, no. 119; New Gallery 1898–99, no. 81; Arts Council 1975–76, no. 243

Collection Viscount Windsor

The sitter was the daughter of Sir Augustus Berkeley Paget, a career diplomat. She was christened Alberta Victoria Sarah Caroline, but was always known as Gay. Her mother, Walburga, Lady Paget, was German; the daughter of a Saxon count, she had been the Countess Hohenthal before her marriage in 1860, and was a close friend of Queen Victoria's eldest daughter, the Princess Royal, who became Empress of Germany. A handsome and rather formidable woman, Lady Paget published a series of reminiscences, much adorned with photographs of herself, which are a valuable record of the time. She was genuinely interested in art and had a certain talent herself, having been trained as a young woman by an adherent of the Nazarene school. She was also a great taker-up of causes and fads, including vegetarianism. Both this and her artistic proclivities were inherited by her daughter.

Gay Paget met her future husband, Robert George Windsor-Clive, 14th Baron Windsor, in 1880 in Rome, where her father was then ambassador. They were married in London three years later, enjoying a fashionable society wedding at Saint Paul's Church, Knightsbridge. Born in 1857, Lord Windsor had inherited his title from his grandmother at the age of twelve and was a man of considerable culture and taste. When he met Gay in Rome in 1880 he was on his way to Greece to draw the illustrations to a travel book, *A Tour in Greece* (1882), by his friend Richard Farrer. In due course he would bring his knowledge of art and architecture to the government post of First Commissioner of Works and a trusteeship of the National Gallery, while in 1903 he published a pioneering book on the landscape painter John Constable (1776–1837), for many years the standard work on the subject. Clearly their mutual interest in art was a great bond between him and Gay, and no doubt too he appreciated her beauty. Tall and slim, with copper lights in her dark hair, she was noted for her shyness, her silence, and her habitually pensive expression.

Lord Windsor was a wealthy man, owning some 30,500 acres, and within a year of their marriage he and Gay were creating a vast neo-Jacobean mansion, Hewell Grange, near Redditch in Worcestershire, while an equally ambitious London house was rising in Mount Street, Mayfair. Set in extensive formal gardens, Hewell was modeled on Montacute House, a genuine Renaissance palace in Somerset, but it was furnished eclectically in a variety of styles. While some rooms



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were Tudor or Jacobean, in keeping with the exterior, others were Italianate, Louis XVI, or even Japanese in taste.

Burne-Jones's portrait of the young chatelaine was intended to add the final touch to this great ensemble. That he was chosen to carry out such an important and sensitive task is hardly surprising. No doubt it was felt that the leading exponent of female beauty in its most spiritualized form would be sure to do justice to the sitter's ethereal charms; also, perhaps, that a painter who so openly acknowledged a debt to the Italian Old Masters was bound to produce something that would harmonize with its neo-Renaissance surroundings. Lady Paget tells us that she had known Burne-Jones since "the

early seventies, [when] he was painting 'Laus Veneris' [cat. no. 63]. . . . His paintings had for me, in those days, a glamour I cannot express. I trembled when I looked at them and could not for days think of anything else."¹ The Windsors, moreover, belonged to the social set known as the Souls, which came to prominence in the 1880s and were noted for their interest in intellectual and artistic matters rather than the sporting activities that engrossed so many members of the English upper classes. Burne-Jones was their favorite painter, and many of his friends, patrons, and admirers in later life were drawn from their ranks.

Burne-Jones was a reluctant portraitist at the best of times, and his likeness of Lady Windsor is truly unique; it is his only full-length and the only attempt he ever made to produce something approaching a conventional society portrait. On the one hand, it clearly sets out to meet more fashionable portrait painters on their own ground. G. F. Watts, for example, had painted a sumptuous full-length of Mrs. Percy Wyndham, a senior figure in the Souls' circle, in the late 1860s (private collection), while John Singer Sargent was to make her three daughters the subject of one of his most swagger performances in 1899 (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York).² At the same time, Burne-Jones not only eschews all the sensuous and theatrical qualities that are the essence of society portraiture but seems to go out of his way to interpret the genre in the most bleak and puritanical terms. The forms of the figure and dress are pared to the minimum, color is drained to near monochrome, and the model is shown looking down so that any possibility of engagement with the spectator, the source of so much dramatic potential, is precluded. As two recent biographers of the Souls have written, it is impossible to equate this austere image with "the glittering figure described by Lady Paget, . . . dancing until three in the morning 'in a grey and gold shot satin gown, a tiara of emeralds and diamonds with a matching necklace. . . .'"³

The Souls loved Burne-Jones for his spirituality, and in commissioning him to paint a full-length likeness of his wife, Lord Windsor was inviting him to create the quintessential portrait to emerge from this rare accommodation between society and progressive art. Nor did the artist produce anything less; if one picture sums up the ideals and aspirations of the coterie, it is undoubtedly this. But Burne-Jones had now reached a stage in his development so extreme that there is a sense in which he goes beyond his patrons' enlightened aestheticism, using the commission to explore the private world with which his late paintings are essentially concerned.

In the last resort, comparison with Watts or Sargent, however tempting in view of the circumstances surrounding the commission, is sterile. The picture belongs to a totally different context, that of the Symbolist portrait. It would not look out of place beside the full-length portraits of Whistler, in which the sitters are endowed with an elusive and enigmatic quality by being shown in slightly murky relief against dark or shadowy backgrounds. A similar approach was adopted by Antonio de la Gandara (1862–1927), a French artist of Spanish descent to whom the critic Albert Samain wrote: "How I adore your

women. . . . You have spiritualised and mysteriously extended their elegance through your art, transforming them into a dream."⁴ Then there is the question of Burne-Jones's relationship with the Belgian Symbolist painter Fernand Khnopff (1858–1921), who visited him in London, exchanged drawings with him, and wrote his obituary for the *Magazine of Art*. Burne-Jones's influence on Khnopff is often noted, but it has also been suggested that the portrait of Lady Windsor depends on a portrait that Khnopff painted of his sister in 1887.⁵ There are certainly remarkable similarities in the conception of the figure and the background forms, but perhaps it is not so much a case of borrowing as a matter of two pictures belonging to a common convention.

The portrait of Lady Windsor is dated 1893, but according to Burne-Jones's work record he did not finish it until shortly before it was exhibited at the New Gallery in 1895. With it appeared three other works, including *The Wedding of Psyche* (cat. no. 41), which shares some of its stylistic traits. By November it was installed at Hewell, where, to her credit, it was much admired by Lady Paget. "Gay's picture by Burne-Jones," she wrote, "now hangs on the staircase. Its blue-green tones harmonise beautifully with the oak panelling. This picture, one of the rare portraits he has ever painted, has been much abused by the critics. Gay is more beautiful, but the entire impression recalls her infinitely well to her best friends."⁶

Lady Paget was right when she said that the picture had been "much abused by the critics." The acclaim Burne-Jones had enjoyed when he exhibited such pictures as *The Garden of Pan* (cat. no. 120) and *The Tower of Brass* (cat. no. 121) in the late 1880s was quick to evaporate as he entered the uncompromising and highly personal world of the portrait of Lady Windsor and *The Wedding of Psyche*. Even F. G. Stephens could not follow him here, dismissing the portrait as "rather unfortunate, and somewhat spectral,"⁷ while the art critic of the *Times* commented that the pictures Burne-Jones was showing this year "seem, from their uniform greyness of colour and from the exaggerated thinness of the figures and the melancholy of the faces, to carry almost too far those idiosyncrasies of sentiment and expression which have belonged to this painter from the beginning. Spirituality in a portrait is an admirable thing, especially in these days when it is so rare; but why pervade a portrait, like that of Lady Windsor, with a world-weariness which would seem to imply that there was no joy left to be drawn either from things of the senses or from the things of the soul?"⁸

When Burne-Jones died three years later, the Windsors attended his memorial service in Westminster Abbey. Lady Paget was apparently not present, but she recorded in her journal that the artist's "sudden death was a great blow to us all," and how "he begged that none of his family should wear mourning for him, and at the memorial service . . . they all appeared in grey and white, even Lady Burne-Jones."⁹ At the studio sale the following month Lord Windsor bought a picture, which suggests that he too was pleased with his wife's portrait, a cloudy affair of angels or spirits so disembodied and

abstract that it must have been one of the last things the artist touched (private collection). Such a taste for late Burne-Jones in a connoisseur who was probably already planning a book on Constable is surely remarkable.

In 1905 Lord Windsor was raised to the peerage, taking the revived title of Earl of Plymouth. In addition to Hewell, he owned a genuine Elizabethan country house, Saint Fagan's Castle, near Cardiff, a mellow and beautiful building set in what George Wyndham described as the "enchanted land of Arthurian romance." The ownership of these two seats brought the Plymouths many responsibilities. He was Lord Lieutenant of Glamorganshire, Mayor of Cardiff, and Honorary Colonel of the Glamorganshire Yeomanry; she was much involved with the welfare of her tenants and devoted herself to the revival of local arts and crafts. The couple had three sons and a daughter, but the eldest son, Other (a family name), died in India in 1908, while the third, Archer, was killed, like so many sons of the Souls, in the Great War. After her husband's death in 1923, Lady Plymouth left Hewell, which, though no more than forty years old, was already an anachronism in a dramatically changed world. Settling at Painswick in Gloucestershire, she lived a reclusive life until, after twenty years of widowhood and in the middle of another war, she died in August 1944.¹⁰ [JC]

1. Walburga, Lady Paget, *In My Tower* (London, 1924), vol. 1, pp. 268–69.
2. Both portraits are in private collections; the Sargent, in which the Watts portrait is seen hanging on the wall behind the sitters, is reproduced in Abdy and Gere 1984, p. 100.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 123.
4. *French Symbolist Painters* (exh. cat., London: Hayward Gallery; Liverpool: Walker Art Gallery [Arts Council], 1972), p. 62, under no. 99. This *Portrait of a Woman* of 1891 (private collection, Paris) is very comparable to the portrait of Lady Windsor in conception.
5. Francine-Claire Legrand, "Fernard Khnopff—Perfect Symbolist," *Apollo*, April 1967, p. 283.
6. Lady Paget, *In My Tower*, vol. 1, p. 161.
7. *Athenaeum*, May 4, 1895, p. 579.
8. *Times* (London), April 27, 1895, p. 12.
9. Lady Paget, *In My Tower*, vol. 1, p. 268.
10. A brief obituary appeared in the *Times* (London), August 23, 1944, p. 7.

162.

The Dream of Launcelot at the Chapel of the San Graal

1895–96

Oil on canvas, 54½ x 66⅞ in. (138.5 x 169.8 cm)

Signed and dated: EBJ 1896

PROVENANCE: W. Graham Robertson; presented by his executors through Kerrison Preston



EXHIBITED: *New Gallery, London, 1896, no. 165; New Gallery 1898–99, no. 122; Arts Council 1975–76, no. 192*
Southampton City Art Gallery (3/1958)

This version of the fourth subject in the Holy Grail tapestries (see cat. no. 148) was the only one in the series to be taken up as a separate oil painting, its somber austerity suiting the artist's later temperament. The compositional alterations to the tapestry design, worked out in a second large chalk drawing,¹ center on changes to the background, which is expanded into a dark and desolate clearing. Launcelot's shield, also given a more subdued armorial, hangs on a withered tree, symbolizing the failure of his ambitions, and in place of John Henry Dearle's plethora of plants and flowers, Burne-Jones has left only briars at the chapel gate. The angel has been made more ethereal, and her profile catches more of the light that shines out onto the figure of the sleeping knight, which is remodeled. Two chalk drawings, now at the Bradford City Art Gallery, show the legs crossed in different ways, Burne-Jones finally deciding to alter their position to allow for a more compact and satisfactory arrangement of figure, drapery, and armor. Two additional drawings of the final figure, nude and draped, are in the Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto.²

The palette in this painting appears restrained, but close observation reveals the great amount of work necessary to achieve such dense, suffused colors. Working at the canvas on January 18, 1896, Burne-Jones found the figure of Launcelot "very hard to get right. But when I've tingled it up with bright points of light, and buzzed about it and given it atmosphere I'll get it right at last. Hard to get colour into it because of the night—or the knight."³ Georgie recorded that the picture "was another of his own favourites, and he used to be jealous when friends turned from it to the brighter 'Aurora' that was in the studio at the same time."⁴ This preference was confirmed in 1896 by visitors to the New Gallery, where both oils were exhibited. Burne-Jones was pleased by Charles Hallé's skill in hanging pictures, finding *Launcelot* "next to a very white one by Mr. [William Blake] Richmond and, though it is so dark, neither hurts the other, though it might be expected they would."⁵ The artist was surprised to find "that all men prefer Launcelot's Dream—all; and all women—all—won't so much as look at it, but prefer Aurora; and I wonder why, for I am a very ignorant person."⁶

1. Colored chalks, 39 x 48 in. (99 x 122 cm); Sotheby's Belgravia, March 27, 1973, lot 36.
2. Art Gallery of Ontario 1993–94, no. A25 a-b.
3. Lago 1981, p. 85 (entry for January 18, 1896).
4. *Memorials*, vol. 2, p. 258; *Aurora* is in the Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane.
5. *Ibid.* p. 282.
6. *Ibid.* p. 283.

163.

Hope

1896

Oil on canvas, 70½ x 25 in. (179 x 63.5 cm)

Signed and dated: E BURNE JONES / Finished 1896



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PROVENANCE: Commissioned by Mrs. George Marston Whitin; by descent; presented by her daughters, 1940

EXHIBITED: Herron Museum of Art 1964, no. 31

Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Given in memory of Mrs. George Marston Whitin by her four daughters, Mrs. Lawrence Murray Keeler, Mrs. Sydney Russell Mason, Mrs. Elijah Kent Swift, and Mrs. William Carey Crane (40.778)

The traditional Christian virtues of Hope, Charity, and Faith formed the subject of a three-light window by Morris, Marshall, Faulkner & Co. in the nave at Christ Church Cathedral, Oxford, for which Burne-Jones charged £15 each for cartoons in January 1871.¹ Each was turned into a large watercolor, probably being painted over the cartoon: *Faith* (Vancouver Art Gallery) and *Hope* (Dunedin Public Art Gallery) in 1871, *Charity* (private collection) in 1872. The artist's preference for sets of four images led him to paint an additional large watercolor, *Temperance* (private collection), also in 1872, which was later adapted as a cartoon for a window of 1876 in Jesus College Chapel, Cambridge.

In 1896 Burne-Jones received a commission for an oil painting from Mrs. George Marston Whitin of Whitinsville, Massachusetts, and it seems that he may have intended to provide a version of *Aurora* (Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane), on which, however, he was encountering difficulties in the early months of 1896.² According to W. G. Constable, Burne-Jones was so affected by the death of William Morris in October that he proposed instead the subject of *Hope*.³ The painting, eventually sent early in 1897, is a nearly exact replica of the 1871 watercolor, in which Burne-Jones had retained the figure from the stained-glass cartoon but placed her in a prison cell, her hand raised to a mysterious blue veil or cloud symbolizing divine succor. Certain refinements were made in the oil, chiefly the reduction of the foreshortening in the foreground, the simplification of drapery folds, and the lengthening of the rich tresses of hair whose soft knot contrasts with the cold iron ankle chain. In both images there are periwinkles on the floor—symbolic attributes for those condemned to death—and the figure holds a branch of apple blossom, for the hope of new life.

Burne-Jones was pleased to hear that the picture had arrived safely, but less so when he learned that his very particular ideas on presentation were not being followed. "Did I tell you that *Hope* has got safely to America? For a long time I didn't know a word about it, and thought that as it had been bought without having been seen by the purchasers they were disappointed with it, and I was going to write to ask them to send it back. But they're very pleased with it—and if I'm very careful we can live a whole summer on the price of it in case I don't sell this [*Love Leading the Pilgrim*, cat. no. 74]. They'll send the cheque soon. But they say they've hung it up without a glass, to see it better, because of reflections in it. They could manage that by sloping it in some way. I like a picture so much better under glass; it's like a kind of aetherial varnish. It's wonderful to me

how people don't see that a picture under glass is so much more beautiful than without it—they're so insensitive. But they must do as they like with it. They can hang it upside down if they will."⁴

1. Sewter 1974–75, vol. 2, p. 146.

2. Lago 1981, p. 90 (entry for February 6, 1896).

3. See W. G. Constable, "'Hope' by Edward Burne-Jones," *Bulletin of the Museum of Fine Arts* (Boston), vol. 39 (February 1941), pp. 12–14.

4. Lago 1981, p. 138 (entry for March 18, 1897).

164.

Saint Michael the Archangel

1896

Bodycolor and pastel, with gold, copper, and silver paint on prepared purple ground, 13 7/8 x 9 7/8 in. (35.2 x 25.1 cm)

Inscribed: MICHAEL ARCHAN GELVS DVX CAELES TIS EXERCITVS / to Laura Tadema Jan. 8. 1896 from EBJ

PROVENANCE: Gift of the artist to Laura Alma-Tadema; anonymous sale, Christie's, March 1, 1946, lot 38; presented by Lord Beaverbrook, ca. 1949

EXHIBITED: Art Gallery of Ontario 1993–94, no. A15

Owens Art Gallery, Mount Allison University, Sackville, New Brunswick



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165.

Musician (Playing)

1897

Gold paint on prepared purple ground, 11 $\frac{7}{8}$ x 8 $\frac{1}{8}$ in. (30.1 x 20.5 cm)

Signed: EB-J 1897

PROVENANCE: First studio sale, Christie's, July 18, 1898, where purchased through Colnaghi

Trustees of the British Museum, London (1898-7-27-1)

BIRMINGHAM ONLY

166.

Fantasy

1897

Black chalk, bodycolor, and gold on prepared purple ground, 19 $\frac{3}{8}$ x 14 $\frac{1}{4}$ in. (49 x 36 cm)

Inscribed: E B J 1897

PROVENANCE: Bequeathed by Cecil French, 1954

EXHIBITED: Victorian Paintings at Riverside, Riverside Studios, Hammersmith, London, 1981, no. 20

London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham: Cecil French Bequest

167.

Head of a Woman

1890s

Gold paint on prepared purple ground, 12 $\frac{5}{8}$ x 8 $\frac{1}{8}$ in. (32.1 x 21.9 cm)

PROVENANCE: Bequeathed by Helen Mary Gaskell, 1939

EXHIBITED: Isetan Museum of Art 1987b, no. 99

The Visitors of the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford (1939.12)

BIRMINGHAM AND PARIS

Burne-Jones's love of drawing encompassed a thorough knowledge of Old Master techniques, bolstered by his ownership of a useful library of books and photographs, many obtained for him by Charles Fairfax Murray. His own experi-



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ments included the practice of metalpoint on prepared grounds (cat. no. 110), some of which were colored, as in the two-figure study for *The Golden Stairs*, formerly in the Lady Lever Art Gallery, Port Sunlight, and now in a private collection in Canada, which also has highlights in white bodycolor.¹ He was beginning to use gold paint on dark backgrounds on a regular basis as early as 1890, when he made up for exhibiting



Edward Burne-Jones, *The Hours*, 1882. Oil on canvas, 34 x 72 $\frac{3}{4}$ in. (86.5 x 183.5 cm). Sheffield City Art Galleries



no oil paintings at the New Gallery by submitting some spectacular works on paper, including the six gouaché studies for the Briar Rose series, now at Birmingham (cat. no. 58), and four "Designs in Gold," one of them on a red ground.

The female musician (cat. no. 165) is very close to the fifth figure, identified as Playing (who comes between Feasting and Sleeping), in the painting *The Hours* (1882), now in the Sheffield City Art Galleries. Such a resemblance is typical of the recurrence in later work of previously successful motifs, as much subconscious as deliberate. Some drawings in this medium seem to have been versions of favorite subjects, such as *Cupid's Hunting Ground* and *Caritas* (*Charity*) shown at the Burlington Fine Arts Club Memorial Exhibition of 1899,² but many others are head studies done for what F. G. Stephens called the pure "rapture of colour-expression."³ Both *Fantasy* (cat. no. 166) and the present *Head of a Woman* are good examples, the latter formerly belonging to his close friend from 1892, Mrs. Helen Mary Gaskell. While making one such drawing on April 22, 1897, he inadvertently smudged it, then told Rooke: "This gold work must be done very directly—it's an art of itself. I forget how I do it between one time and another, and it's always an experiment."⁴

Saint Michael the Archangel (cat. no. 164) is one of the most elaborate of these works, and comes closest to re-creating the type of early medieval book art that had always greatly impressed on the artist. In one of his letters of this period to Frances Horner, daughter of his patron William Graham, he mentions seeing a Byzantine book of Gospels in Quaritch's bookshop, with "every sheet dipped in a vat of Tyrian purple dye. There are five-and-twenty tints of Tyrian purple. When you dipped the first time a pale rose colour came and when you dipped the twenty-fifth time it was the colour of a black poppy."⁵ The figure of Saint Michael is adapted from a design of 1886 for stained glass formerly in the English Church of Saint George in Berlin,⁶ which itself derives from one of the archangels in the *Heavenly Jerusalem* mosaic of 1880–85 for the American Church in Rome. The inscription on the 1896 drawing identifies it as a gift from Edward and Georgiana Burne-Jones to Laura Epps, the second wife of the painter Lawrence Alma-Tadema and a considerable artist in her own right, who exhibited both at the Grosvenor and at the New Gallery. The two families developed a close friendship beginning in the early 1880s, Burne-Jones and Alma-Tadema often dining together at Previtali's restaurant.⁷ A letter from Burne-Jones formerly accompanying the drawing announced: "Here is a little gold sort-of-thing which I have made o' purpose for you. . . . I only wish it was prettier, and that the gold would shine more, but if you will accept it as coming from loving and lasting friends, its purpose will be accomplished."⁸

1. Art Gallery of Ontario 1993–94, no. A38.

2. Burlington Fine Arts Club 1899, nos. 146, 149; *Caritas* is in the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford.

3. *Athenaeum*, February 4, 1899, p. 152.

4. *Lago* 1981, p. 143.

5. Horner 1933, p. 139.



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6. The cartoon for *Saint Michael*, along with three other subjects for the Berlin window, was sold out of the collection of the Ruskin Galleries, Bembridge, at Sotheby's, April 26, 1990, lot 54.

7. J. Comyns Carr, *Coasting Bohemia* (London, 1914), p. 31.

8. Quoted in Art Gallery of Ontario 1993–94, p. 61.

168.

Girls Dancing

1896

Gold paint on prepared black ground, 9 x 6½ in. (22.9 x 16.5 cm).

Signed and dated: EB-J 1896

PROVENANCE: William Hesketh Lever, 1st Viscount Leverhulme

EXHIBITED: Lady Lever Art Gallery 1948, no. 63

Board of Trustees of the National Museums and Galleries on Merseyside, Liverpool (Lady Lever Art Gallery, Port Sunlight; WHL3977)

This is a fine example of a particular type of Burne-Jones's exotic late drawings, in gold on a black ground, like "the colour of a black poppy" he had admired in a Byzantine Gospel book (see cat. no. 167). Along with another, similar drawing, also formerly in the Lady Lever Art Gallery,¹ it takes up one of the artist's abiding delights, the effect of clinging drapery on female figures, which he so admired in early Renaissance art. In 1871, responding to a catalogue of photographs sent to him



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by Charles Eliot Norton, he had enthused over Ghirlandaio's "sweet girls running, and their dresses blown about,"² and on his trip to Italy two years later he had made careful studies of such figures in the fifteenth-century inlaid-marble floor of Siena Cathedral.³ Further notes on similar images can be found in a sketchbook, which he particularly prized, recording visits to the Print Room of the British Museum, probably in the 1880s.⁴ Other fruits of this long-term study appear in designs for the Kelmscott *Chaucer*, such as the dancing girls in the Garden of Mirth, from the *Romaunt of the Rose*.

The second drawing of *Girls Dancing*, in the Lady Lever Art Gallery, was used by Robert Catterson-Smith, Burne-Jones's protégé and helper with the Kelmscott *Chaucer* designs, as the model for one of two repoussé silver plaques shown at the fifth exhibition of the Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society in 1896.⁵ Burne-Jones returned to the theme for the last time in a six-figure design of *Girls Dancing*, in bodycolor and gold on a blue ground, dated 1898.⁶

1. Lady Lever Art Gallery 1948, no. 62, illus.

2. *Memorials*, vol. 2, p. 21.

3. Robinson 1975a, p. 348, figs. 2, 4.

4. Wightwick Manor (The National Trust, WIG/D/180); the inscription on the front endpaper—"Whoever brings this to the above address [The Grange] shall be rewarded to the amount of one guinea"—is a reminder that Burne-Jones happily, if surprisingly, left sketchbooks for visitors to look at in the studio.

5. *Catalogue of the Fifth Exhibition* (exh. cat., London: Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society, 1896) nos. 109, 110, reproduced in *Studio 9* (1896), p. 119.

6. Sotheby's, June 23, 1981, lot 98.

169.

Self-caricature: Unpainted Masterpieces

ca. 1890

Pen and ink, 6 7/8 x 4 1/4 in. (17.6 x 10.7 cm)

Inscribed: unpainted masterpieces

PROVENANCE: Mrs. Leslie Stephen; Sotheby's, Books, July 22, 1980, Charleston Papers, lot 212

EXHIBITED: Tate Gallery 1993, no. 1

Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery (1980P128)

170a-c.

Three self-caricatures

1890s

Pencil, two 6 x 3 3/8 in. (15.2 x 9.9 cm); one 7 x 4 1/2 in. (17.8 x 11.4 cm)

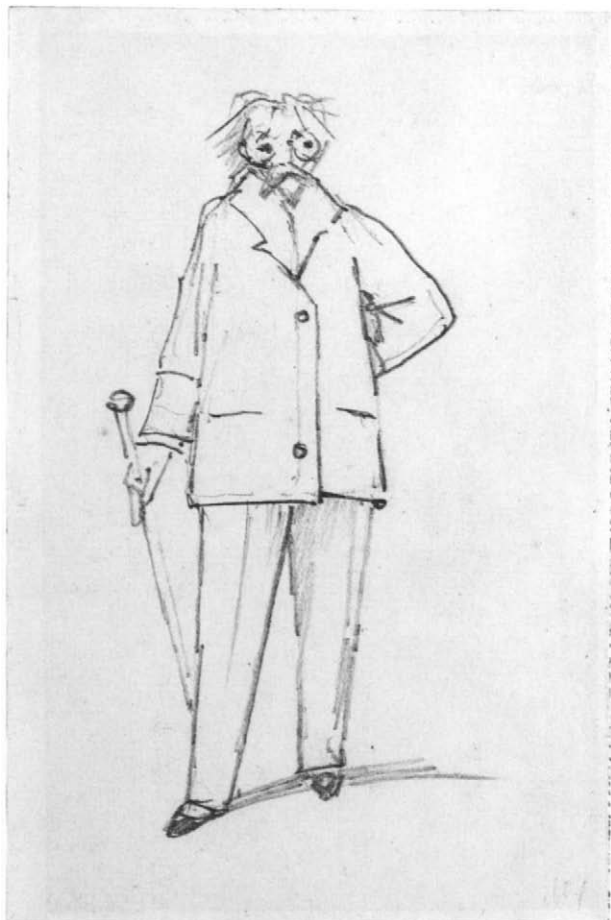
PROVENANCE: Gaskell family; Sotheby's Belgravia, March 23, 1981, lot 28; presented by Frederick R. Koch, 1981

The Pierpont Morgan Library, New York. Gift of Mr. Frederick R. Koch (1981.60.1-3)

NEW YORK ONLY



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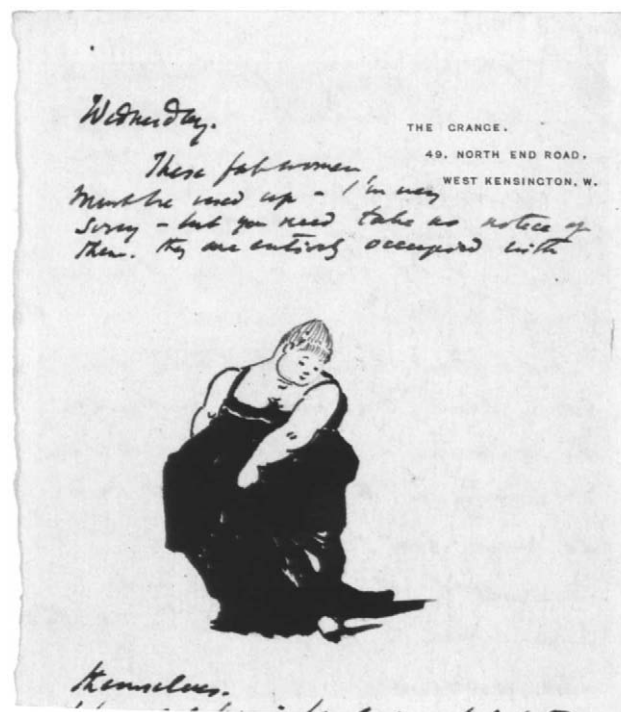
170a



170b



170c



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171.

Caricature of a “fat lady”

1890s

Pen and brown ink, $5\frac{1}{4} \times 4\frac{1}{2}$ in. (13.2 x 11.4 cm)

Inscribed as part of accompanying letter: *Wednesday / These fat women must be used up—I'm very sorry—but you need take no notice of them, they are entirely occupied with themselves*

PROVENANCE: Gaskell family; Sotheby's Belgravia, March 23, 1981, lot 33; presented by Frederick R. Koch, 1981

The Pierpont Morgan Library, New York. Gift of Mr. Frederick R. Koch (1981.60.5)

NEW YORK ONLY

172.

William Morris reading to Burne-Jones

ca. 1865

Pen and ink, $7\frac{1}{8} \times 4\frac{1}{2}$ in. (18 x 11.5 cm)

PROVENANCE: Presented by Dr. Robert Steele, 1976

EXHIBITED: Victoria and Albert Museum 1996, no. A.15

Victoria and Albert Museum, London (E.450-1976)

173.

William Morris giving a demonstration of weaving

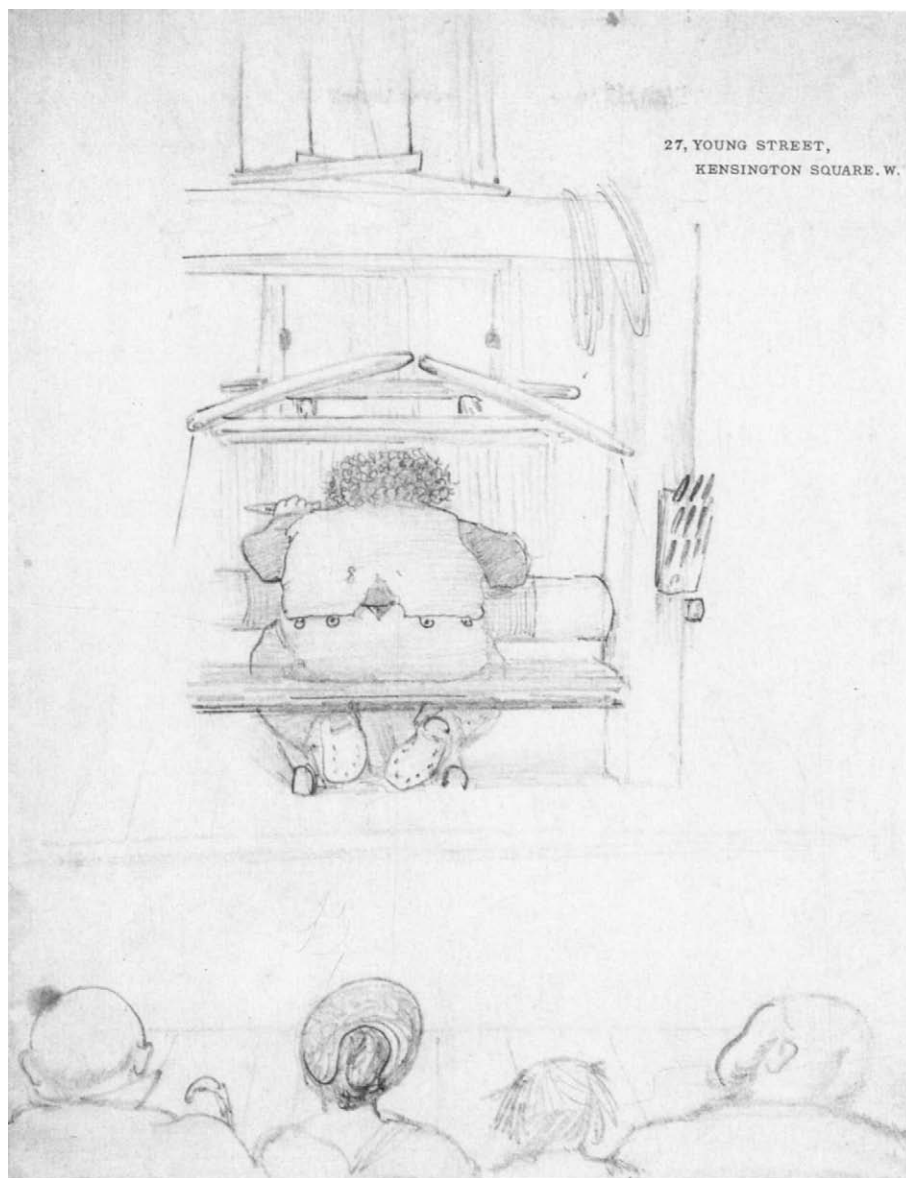
1888

Pencil, $9 \times 6\frac{1}{8}$ in. (22.9 x 17.5 cm)

PROVENANCE: Professor and Mrs. J. W. Mackail (the artist's daughter); presented by their daughter, Mrs. Angela Thirkell, 1953

William Morris Gallery, Walthamstow (London Borough of Waltham Forest; D133)

The range and constancy of Burne-Jones's humor may come as a surprise to those familiar only with his majestic, romantic paintings, as it did to Henry James when he reported in a letter to a friend that the artist “is (privately) a most delightful caricaturist and pencil satirist, little as you might suspect it.”¹ This other persona was known only to family and intimate friends, who could still be startled by the swift change from seriousness to whimsy. Graham Robertson recalled that “as one gazed in reverence, the hieratic calm of the face would be broken by a smile so mischievous, so quaintly



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malign, as to unfrock the priest at once and transform the mage into the conjurer at a children's party . . . it was like meeting the impish eyes of Puck beneath the cowl of a monk."²

The lighter side of Burne-Jones's character had been evident from childhood, when he drew caricature portraits of the masters at King Edward VI School, Birmingham, but was fully revealed only in Georgie's *Memorials*, published in 1904, which are sprinkled with examples of comic sketches. His habit of producing humorous drawings was encouraged in the company of Rossetti and the second-generation Pre-Raphaelites³ and spread to his sketchbooks and the margins of serious work. "He was at it all the time," his studio assistant Matthew Webb remembered. "He loved to produce these amusing things, without end." On one occasion a fellow studio assistant "in hat and overcoat . . . [had] to stand for a drawing of the Rape of the Sabine Women, done with a few lines, for Burne-Jones had no great respect for realistically elaborated humorous drawings."⁴ He could maintain great consistency in such things, however, and for many years delighted not only his own children but also those—chiefly the daughters—of his close friends with illustrated letters and stories featuring monsters,

cats, and the chaotic world of the studio, "made ostensibly for the children," as Georgie remarked, "but really for the child that was always in himself."⁵

Self-caricatures abound in Burne-Jones's letters, and were often used as a way to jolly himself out of a dark mood; many show him in comic despair, one of the funniest depicting a servant cleaning the studio floor, with the artist holding his head in his hands.⁶ *Unpainted Masterpieces* (cat. no. 169) reflects the feeling expressed to Charles Eliot Norton in 1880 that "my rooms are so full of work . . . [and] I have begun so much that if I live to be as old as the oldest inhabitant of Fulham I shall never complete it."⁷ By the 1890s that feeling had grown into the genuine concern that "I don't feel that I have the time before me that I used to, and it won't do to put by anything I am about for fear I shouldn't have the chance of taking it up again."⁸

The "fat lady" was a favorite symbol of the pomposity encountered during reluctant forays into society,⁹ but the image also held a kind of grim fascination in its own right. In 1894 Burne-Jones went to the Westminster Aquarium to see Emma Frank, the American Tattooed Lady, who bore on her back a representation of Leonardo da Vinci's *Last Supper*. She

appears in illustrated letters to Violet Maxse (later Lady Milner) and was also drawn to amuse the Tuan Mada of Sarawak during his illness, along with a depiction of "Mrs. — at Rottingdean on her honeymoon . . . [with] no indication of virginal contours."¹⁰ For balance, he also drew an unflattering likeness of two Japanese sumo wrestlers seen at the Olympia exhibition hall.¹¹

William Morris was the inevitable butt of many of Burne-Jones's caricatures, just as he had been for Rossetti. His increasing girth occasioned a typical practical joke in his early years, as when Burne-Jones and Charles Faulkner surreptitiously narrowed his waistcoat by restitching the lining,¹² and the portly mature Morris appears in many amusing drawings: two collections formerly belonging to the Ionides family include depictions of him riding, climbing, executing handstands, and playing Ping-Pong.¹³ There are variants of the famous image of Morris reading aloud to Burne-Jones (cat. no. 172; another is in the British Museum)¹⁴ that complement Georgie's shamefaced confession to "often falling asleep to the steady rhythm of the reading voice, [and] biting my fingers and stabbing myself with pins in order to keep awake" during the author's recitations from *The Earthly Paradise*.¹⁵ The present lively record of Morris weaving was made during a demonstration at the Arts and Crafts Exhibition in November 1888.

1. Letter to Elizabeth Boott, December 11, 1883, in *Henry James: Letters*, edited by Leon Edel, vol. 3, 1883–1895 (Cambridge, Mass., 1980), p. 18. For

a discussion of Burne-Jones's humorous drawings, see Lambourne 1975. Several important groups of works have appeared in the salesroom: Sotheby's Belgravia, June 20, 1972, lots 66–73; Sotheby's Belgravia, June 29, 1976, lots 210–250; Sotheby's Belgravia, March 23, 1981, lots 27–40; Christie's, October 16, 1981, lots 40–46; and Sotheby's, January 31, 1990, lots 331–343.

2. Robertson 1931, p. 76.

3. See Stephen Wildman, "Three Pre-Raphaelite 'cadavres exquis,'" in *Reframing the Pre-Raphaelites*, edited by Ellen Harding (Aldershot, 1996), pp. 253–60.

4. Webb 1908–9, pp. 422–23.

5. The best of these, written to Katie Lewis (fig. 103), were published in 1925 as *Letters to Katie*. A book of drawings made for his granddaughter Angela was sold at Sotheby's, November 3, 1993, lots 202–217.

6. In a letter to a member of the Gaskell family; Sotheby's Belgravia, March 23, 1981, lot 32.

7. *Memorials*, vol. 2, p. 107.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 305.

9. A splendid watercolor sketch of a stuffy dinner party was sold at Sotheby's Belgravia, June 29, 1976, lot 249; a related drawing, *The type of man Burne-Jones couldn't stand*, was sold at Sotheby's Belgravia, December 6, 1977, lot 70. Another depiction, *Two "fat ladies" conversing* is in the British Museum (*Letters to Katie* 1988, fig. 1).

10. H. H. The Dayang Muda of Sarawak, *Relations and Complications* (London, 1929), p. 98. The Rottingdean sketch was sold at Sotheby's Belgravia, June 29, 1976, lot 248, along with two of the Emma Frank drawings (lot 246); the Maxse letters appeared at Sotheby's (Books), July 19, 1989, lot 404. Another drawing of Miss Frank appears on the verso of a study for the Kelmscott *Chaucer*, now in the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge (reproduced in Lambourne 1975, fig. 8).

11. Sotheby's Belgravia, June 29, 1976, lot 245.

12. J. Comyns Carr, *Coasting Bohemia* (London, 1914), pp. 86–87.

13. Sotheby's Belgravia, June 29, 1976, lots 210ff., and Christie's, June 7, 1996, lot 557.

14. Also exhibited in Victoria and Albert Museum 1996, no. A15.

15. *Memorials*, vol. 2, p. 297.

CHRONOLOGY

- 1833** Born August 28 at 11 Bennett's Hill, Birmingham, premises of his father, Edward Richard Jones, framer and gilder. His mother, Elizabeth Coley, dies within a week, leaving Edward to be raised by the housekeeper, Miss Sampson. Named Burne after his aunt.
- 1844–52** Attends King Edward VI School, New Street, Birmingham; makes caricature drawings of masters. From 1848 attends Government School of Design three evenings a week.
- 1851** First meets Georgiana Macdonald, eleven-year-old daughter of a Methodist minister and the sister of a schoolmate.
- 1853** January: Enters Exeter College, Oxford, and meets William Morris; both intend to enter the Church.
- 1854** First sees a Pre-Raphaelite painting, John Everett Millais's *Return of the Dove to the Ark* (fig. 47), followed by a visit to the Royal Academy, where he sees William Holman Hunt's *The Awakening Conscience* (1853–54; Tate Gallery, London) and *The Light of the World* (fig. 46). Begins *Fairy Family* illustrations (cat. nos. 1–3) for Archibald MacLaren.
- 1855** Sees Ford Madox Brown's *The Last of England* (1855; Birmingham Museums and Art Gallery) and a work by Dante Gabriel Rossetti. Takes walking tour with Morris of cathedrals in northern France and visits the Musée du Louvre, Paris; decides to become a painter. Discovers Thomas Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur* in a Birmingham bookshop.
- 1856** Contributes writings to *Oxford and Cambridge Magazine*. January: Meets John Ruskin and Rossetti. May: Leaves Oxford University without graduating, and settles in London, sharing rooms with Morris from November at 17 Red Lion Square. Takes lessons in painting from Rossetti. First finished drawing, *The Waxen Image* (present whereabouts unknown). Becomes engaged to Georgiana.
- 1857** Begins first oil painting, *The Blessed Damsel* (unfinished; private collection), and designs stained glass for James Powell & Sons (cat. no. 4). *Fairy Family* published. August: Joins campaign, organized by Rossetti, to paint murals at the Oxford Union Society.
- 1858** Visits Arthur Hughes at Maidstone. Spends summer with the Prinsep family at Little Holland House, Kensington, where he meets Alfred, Lord Tennyson, and is encouraged by the painter G. F. Watts. September: Moves to 24 Russell Place, Fitzroy Square. Founding member of the Hogarth Club (1858–61). Makes first important pen-and-ink drawings (cat. nos. 5, 6).
- 1859** Teaches drawing at the Working Men's College (until 1861). April: Attends the wedding of Morris and Jane Burden in Oxford. September: First visit to Italy, reaching Venice, with Charles Faulkner and Val Prinsep.
- 1860** June 9, marries Georgiana Macdonald, in Manchester. Regular visits to the Morris' new home, Red House, Bexleyheath; paints the Sir Degrevant murals (cat. no. 11). Friendship with the poet Algernon Charles Swinburne. Designs stained-glass window for Lavers and Barraud.
- 1861** Completes altarpiece for Saint Paul's Church, Brighton (cat. no. 10). April: Founding partner of Morris, Marshall, Faulkner & Co.

- Draws *Childe Roland* (cat. no. 14) for Ruskin. Autumn: Moves to 62 Great Russell Street, opposite the British Museum, in rooms formerly occupied by the painter Henry Wallis. Son, Philip, born in October.
- 1862** First of two illustrations is published in the magazine *Good Words*, engraved by the Dalziel brothers. May to July: With Georgie, visits Italy with Ruskin, making copies of Old Masters (cat. no. 20) in Milan and Venice. Decorative work is well received at the International Exhibition, South Kensington (cat. no. 18). Meets Thomas Carlyle. Death of patron Thomas Plint.
- 1863** Ruskin's father, John James Ruskin, purchases watercolor *Fair Rosamund*. August: Visits Winnington Hall, Cheshire, and designs embroidery as gift for Ruskin. Also begins watercolor *The Wine of Circe* (fig. 24) for Ruskin.
- 1864** Elected an Associate of the Society of Painters in Water Colour (Old Water-Colour Society): four works exhibited, including *The Merciful Knight* (cat. no. 26). Plans made, but abandoned, to join Morris family in extension to Red House. Son Christopher born, but dies aged only three weeks.
- 1865** In the New Year moves to 41 Kensington Square. Receives gift of four Dürer engravings from Ruskin. Commissioned by Myles Birket Foster to make a series of paintings, *The Legend of Saint George* (cat. nos. 31–36). Begins illustrations to Morris's cycle of narrative poems *The Earthly Paradise* (cat. no. 37). Meets James Abbott McNeill Whistler at Madox Brown's house. Last visit to Red House, soon given up by Morris. Finds two new patrons, William Graham and Frederick Leyland.
- 1866** June: Daughter, Margaret, born. Georgie's sister Agnes marries the artist Edward Poynter. Friendship with George Howard (later 9th Earl of Carlisle). Dedicatee of Swinburne's *Poems and Ballads*. August: Visits the poet William Allingham in Lymington, and crosses to the Isle of Wight with Morris to see Tennyson.
- 1867** Takes on Charles Fairfax Murray as studio assistant. November: Moves to The Grange, North End Lane, Fulham (west London). Begins relationship with Maria Zambaco.
- 1868** Year of ill health. Meets George Eliot; friendship with Charles Eliot Norton.
- 1869** January: Attempt to end affair with Maria Zambaco results in public scene. Little work completed. Thomas Matthews Rooke replaces Murray as studio assistant.
- 1870** *Phyllis and Demophoön* (cat. no. 48) receives hostile reception at the Old Water-Colour Society; removes picture from exhibition and resigns membership. Paints symbolic portrait of Maria Zambaco (cat. no. 49), who accepts the ending of the relationship; reconciled with Georgie. Starts several major paintings, including *The Story of Troy* (cat. no. 50): beginning of the "seven blissfullest years of work."
- 1871** At lunch with George Eliot, meets the Russian novelist Ivan Sergeevich Turgenev. Temporary rift with Ruskin over the merits of Michelangelo. September: Third visit to Italy includes Florence, Assisi, and Rome; studies paintings in the Sistine Chapel.
- 1872** Begins many pictures, including the Briar Rose series (cat. nos. 55–58) and *The Golden Stairs* (cat. no. 109). George Howard commissions the Cupid and Psyche frieze (cat. no. 40) for 1 Palace Green. Begins cartoons for stained glass, Jesus College Chapel, Cambridge (cat. nos. 69, 70).
- 1873** February: Exhibits two watercolors at the Dudley Gallery, London. Georgie and Margaret visit Ruskin at Brantwood. April: Last visit to Italy, initially with Morris; visits painter friend Spencer Stanhope in Florence and Fairfax Murray in Siena. At Christmas entertains young nephew Rudyard Kipling.
- 1874** August: Stays with George Howard at Naworth Castle, Cumberland. October: Visits Charles Faulkner in Oxford. Renews friendship with Rossetti.
- 1875** Becomes sole designer of stained glass for reconstituted Morris & Company. Visits

- Ruskin at Oxford and Morris at Kelmscott Manor. Drawings are among art collection given by Ruskin to Oxford University. Receives commission from Arthur Balfour for the Perseus series (cat. nos. 88–98).
- 1876** August: On doctor's orders, takes holiday with schoolfriend Cormell Price at Broadway, Worcestershire. Completes *The Mirror of Venus* (fig. 86) and *The Days of Creation* (fig. 79).
- 1877** Exhibits eight paintings at the new Grosvenor Gallery, to great critical acclaim; praised by Ruskin in same issue of *Fors Clavigera* in which he attacks Whistler. Employs Matthew Webb as junior studio assistant. Attends concerts of Wagner at the Royal Albert Hall. First visit to Rottingdean, near Brighton.
- 1878** Eleven more works exhibited at the Grosvenor Gallery, including *Laus Veneris* (cat. no. 63) and *Le Chant d'Amour* (cat. no. 84). Visits Paris at Easter, with Morris. *The Beguiling of Merlin* (cat. no. 64) shown at the Exposition Universelle, Paris. August: Brief holiday in Bonneville and Annecy. November: Reluctantly gives evidence for Ruskin in trial for libel of Whistler.
- 1879** *Pygmalion and the Image* (cat. no. 87) exhibited at the Grosvenor Gallery. Makes only public speech, in Oxford, for campaign against the insensitive restoration of Saint Mark's, Venice; allows Rooke to make copies of mosaics for Ruskin. Friendship with William Gladstone. Receives commission from William Graham for the Orpheus piano (cat. no. 125); friendship with Frances Graham.
- 1880** Introduces Georgie to Tennyson. Completes *The Golden Stairs* (cat. no. 109) for the Grosvenor Gallery. Last meeting with George Eliot. Friendship with Oscar Wilde. Visits the Wyndham family at Clouds, Wiltshire, and Cormell Price in Devon. Buys North End House, Rottingdean, as a summer retreat.
- 1881** Awarded Honorary Doctorate by Oxford University. Friendship with the painter Lawrence Alma-Tadema. Commission from G. E. Street for mosaics at the American Church in Rome. Begins *Arthur in Avalon* (fig. 107), as a commission from George Howard.
- 1882** First designs in *The Flower Book* (cat. no. 135). Death of Rossetti. Father marries housekeeper, Miss Sampson. Garden studio built at The Grange. Makes first designs for Morris & Company tapestries *Flora* and *Pomona* (cat. nos. 133, 134). Begins humorous *Letters to Katie* (fig. 103).
- 1883** Designs stained glass and May Queen cross (cat. no. 136) for Whitelands College, London, at Ruskin's request. May: Ruskin commends work in his Oxford "Art of England" lecture. With Morris, receives Honorary Fellowship of Exeter College, Oxford. Stained glass exhibited at Morris & Company stand, Boston Foreign Fair.
- 1884** Henry James and John Singer Sargent visit studio. *King Cophetua and the Beggar Maid* (cat. no. 112) shown at the Grosvenor Gallery. Georgie and Margaret pay second visit to Ruskin at Brantwood. Designs first of four major windows at Saint Philip's Church (later Cathedral), Birmingham.
- 1885** June: Elected an Associate of the Royal Academy of Arts. Accepts title of Honorary President of Royal Birmingham Society of Artists. October: visits Birmingham. Death of patron William Graham. First mosaic at the American Church, Rome, unveiled. Begins "Secret" *Book of Designs* (cat. no. 140).
- 1886** *The Depths of the Sea* (cat. no. 119) exhibited at the Royal Academy, his only exhibit there. Designs memorial tablet to Laura Lyttelton (fig. 100). Reluctantly accepts reelection as a member of the Old Water-Colour Society.
- 1887** Paints watercolor of Saint Francis for Father Damien, the leper-priest of Molokai. *The Garden of Pan* (cat. no. 120) is among his last exhibits at the Grosvenor Gallery.
- 1888** Begins to exhibit at the New Gallery, Regent Street, including *The Tower of Brass* (cat. no. 121) and two oils from the Perseus series (cat. nos. 88–98). Decorative work shown at the first exhibition of the Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society, New Gallery. September:

- Margaret marries J. W. Mackail (later Morris's biographer), in Rottingdean church.
- 1889** January: Father dies, aged eighty-seven. Attends musical soirée at Leighton House. Buys adjoining house at Rottingdean, providing studio and snug room, called the Merry Mermaid. *King Cophetua and the Beggar Maid* (cat. no. 112) exhibited at the Exposition Universelle, Paris; awarded the cross of the Légion d'honneur. December: Present at Robert Browning's funeral, Westminster Abbey.
- 1890** Briar Rose series (cat. nos. 55–58) exhibited at Agnew's, Bond Street, and at Toynbee Hall, east London. Draws portrait of the Polish pianist Ignace Jan Paderewski. Granddaughter Angela (Mackail, later Thirkell) born. Begins designs for the Holy Grail tapestries (cat. nos. 145–151).
- 1891** *The Star of Bethlehem* (cat. no. 141) included in the Pre-Raphaelite exhibition, Birmingham. Begins illustrations for the Kelmscott Press (cat. no. 153). Aubrey Beardsley visits studio. Declines commission to decorate the dome of Saint Paul's Cathedral, London, with mosaic.
- 1892** Deaths of Leyland and Tennyson. Grandson Denis (Mackail) born. Friendship with Helen Mary Gaskell. Elected corresponding member of the Académie des Beaux-Arts, Paris. Declines invitation to exhibit with the Rose+Croix. November: Retrospective exhibition of work opens at the New Gallery.
- 1893** Resigns Associateship of the Royal Academy. Accidental damage to the watercolor *Love among the Ruins* (private collection). Paints portrait of Lady Windsor (cat. no. 161). Presents three drawings to the Musée de Luxembourg, Paris. Death of Madox Brown.
- 1894** January: Accepts from Gladstone offer of a Baronetcy; legalizes name of Burne-Jones. Completes oil version of *Love among the Ruins* (National Trust: Wightwick Manor). Meets Belgian painter Fernand Khnopff and exchanges drawings. Visits Gladstone at Hawarden. Two more mosaics unveiled at the American Church in Rome.
- 1895** Designs scenery and costumes for J. Comyns Carr's play *King Arthur*, Lyceum Theatre. First indications of heart trouble. Sees Emma Frank, the American Tattooed Lady, at Westminster Aquarium.
- 1896** June: Kelmscott *Chaucer* (cat. no. 154) published. With Morris visits the Society of Antiquaries to view manuscripts. April: Exhibition of drawings at the Fine Art Society. Deaths of Leighton and Millais. October 3: Death of Morris; attends funeral at Kelmscott.
- 1897** Attends party at the New Gallery for Watts's eightieth birthday. Completes *Love Leading the Pilgrim* (cat. no. 74). Convalesces from influenza, at Malvern. Georgie visits cathedrals of northern France. Rudyard Kipling takes a house in Rottingdean. Declines invitation to Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee celebration dinner. Makes last designs for Kelmscott Press. Last Judgment window installed at Saint Philip's Church, Birmingham (fig. 20).
- 1898** Begins last major design, for the *Passing of Venus* tapestry (cat. no. 100). Completes *The Prioress's Tale* (cat. no. 43), begun in 1865. Death of Gladstone; attends funeral. Dies of angina, the night of June 16–17. Ashes placed in Rottingdean churchyard; memorial service, Westminster Abbey. Retrospective exhibition of work at the New Gallery, winter 1898–99.

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What follows is a comprehensive list of works in which Burne-Jones's life and work feature prominently; general books on Pre-Raphaelitism and Victorian painting are not included, although several major exhibition catalogues are.

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